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# Action Plan on Communication Practices: Roles of Tutors at EMU Distance Education Institute to Overcome Social Barriers in Constructing Knowledge

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degree of Doctorate in Professional Studies

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## **ABSTRACT**

The research involved action plan for the improvement of Distance Education Institute for quality mission of Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) based on European University Association (EUA) norms. My project contributed online pedagogy and teaching process for online tutors. Research aimed to stress the importance of communication process and investigate roles of tutors in facilitating communication to construct knowledge in online learning-teaching process. The research has inductive nature that action research approach was employed to change professional practices of tutors through collaborative activities. Therefore, focus group, trainings, in-depth interviews, self-report and research diary were used as data collection techniques in this qualitative research. Content analysis was implemented to analyze triangulated data. The research results revealed that tutors were novices on online pedagogy and they had no prior knowledge on the importance of communication and socialization to help students construct knowledge in their learning process. My research puts forward to gaining in-depth understanding on how to teach online courses based on Salmon's five stage model. My research project provided change and development which contributed professional development of the tutors in online pedagogy. As online pedagogy is one of the critical factors to reach out quality improvements, my research filled the gap on the roles of tutors in facilitating communication to construct knowledge by practical and collaborative work of the professionals. In this respect, I as insider researcher and the participants gained reward of the professional learning and experiences from the learning cycle of the participatory action research.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the rationale for this project, covers the main themes that are being investigated and the need for my project in my working practice. Further, it gives details of the significance of my project by discussing the reasons for conducting my project, my research interests, and contextualizes my work-based project and my role. Furthermore, it explains how my project was carried out with regard to its underlying aims. Finally, this chapter details the outcomes of my project and its limitations.

### **1.1 Rationale For My Work Based Research Project**

In developing continuous quality improvement in higher education, there is an intense need to develop innovative strategies in order to gain competitive advantage. In this respect, strategic plans regarding the collective vision, culture, and climate of higher educational organizations need to incorporate distance education practice as one aspect of innovation in order to gain differentiation and competitive advantage (Zhang, 2001; Eilertsen *et al.*, 2008).

#### *Main themes to be investigated*

Higher education institutions can gain a competitive advantage by developing service differentiation within which distance education could be the most effective service and strategy for improving institutional performance and reputation in line with global standards in a competitive environment.

Thomas (2007) holds that distance education practices for the universities which have dual mode, are an innovative strategy for quality. According to Kamau (1999), universities can have a dual mode model incorporating both distance education and traditional applications in their organizational structure (Mugridge,

1992). Distance education has gained popularity as an alternative mode of delivery because of its ability to address issues of equity for people who could continue with their education for one reason or other. It enables higher institutions to train staff, upgrade academic and professional qualifications and impart new skills without withdrawing staff from their duties. Its flexibility has made it a feasible alternative to the traditional mode since it utilizes available physical, human and material resources.

In order to sustain quality in standards for higher education, distance education practices need to be developed in both pedagogical and organisational aspects. In this respect, communicative practices are a crucial element. Higher education institutions need to expand their connection with internal and external environments and develop a new pedagogy by considering the changing roles of tutors based on change and development activities regarding strategic action plans. Academic staff who teach courses in distance education programmes need to be aware of changing roles and new pedagogies in the online context by putting emphasis on the impact of social presence and collaborative learning on students' learning and satisfaction.

The study of Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2004) provides in-depth insight into features of quality management based on four well-articulated methodologies for the practice of quality in higher education. The study reflects the necessity of quality improvements and performance assessment in higher education through the use of various activities and quality action plans.

The role of communication and collaboration are seen as critical factors in the implementation of change and development of quality improvements in this project (Frahm and Brown, 2006; Parka *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, the nature of interaction

among teachers and how that collegial interaction influenced teachers' professional development is an important consideration in the study.

McPherson and Nunes (2006) discuss distance education practices that universities use as innovative strategies to gain competitive advantage. Their belief that pedagogical and organizational issues are critical factors for success also provided an important rationale for the research project.

Meyer (2002) sees quality in distance education as a complex and difficult process involving such factors as students, the curriculum, the instructional design, technology and faculty characteristics.

Quality in online education requires learner focused online education. In this respect, online tutors need to be facilitators and encourage online learners to take their own learning process forward but without disregarding the facilitation of collaborative learning and social interaction (Pallof and Pratt, 2003).

Hubbard, Power (1993) suggest that online education practices can be changed and developed through action research approach based on collaboration and facilitation in the process. In this respect, Saito *et al.* (2008) consider the significance of action research as a tool for reform which can enrich online education practices.

Meanwhile, the criteria for being effective online tutors designing courses specifically for distance learning rather than in-class courses includes such matters as planning activities carefully, letting students know agendas in advance, being comfortable with technology, and guiding students about the technology and the structure of the system. Interaction is seen as the critical element in the lifelong learning process (Gilbert, 2001).

Berge (1995) categorises roles of tutors according to direct human-human communication, transaction router, storage and retrieval functions. The most important of these roles is the responsibility for maintaining discourse, contributing special knowledge and insights, weaving together various discussion threads and course components and maintaining group harmony. In addition, Berge (1995) identifies elements of successful online tutoring, specifically, pedagogical (intellectual, task), social (social presence to overcome social barrier), managerial (organizational, administrative), technical (technology transparent).

Coppola *et al.* (2002) also provide insight into pedagogical roles and the changing roles of tutors in the online learning and teaching process. Lim and Cheah (2003) respond positively to the Berge (1995) study on the roles of tutors, in the context of Singapore, categorizing these roles as managerial, facilitating and pedagogical. The study examines the pre-discussion, discussion and post-discussion evaluations of the role of tutors by focus groups and discussion record analysis. Martinez *et al.* (2007) adopt a different perspective by looking at unsuccessful online courses to propose components for pedagogical and facilitating roles.

In line with this, Caballe *et al.* (2008) provide a layered framework to analyze learning interactions and roles of tutors. Bruyn (2004) emphasises the importance of social presence in improving the facilitating role. Easton (2003) meanwhile explores communication processes that affect the role of online distance learning through an ethnographic case study.

Maor (2003) provides the framework for my own participatory action research process in particular relation to the research focus, which focuses on dialogue,



instructor e-learning and the joint construction of knowledge. The simple metaphor of the “four hats” of pedagogical, social, managerial and technical actions is used as a framework to discuss the role of the tutors and the construction of knowledge based on the convergence of social presence and interaction.

Salmon (2002) provides a Five Stage Model for the online learning and teaching process. The quality and competencies of online tutors within this Five Stage Model provided a further rationale for my project.

#### *The need for my work based research project*

Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) initiated a review process by the European University Association (EUA) in 2004. The EUA monitors institutional evaluation in higher education and the review process of EMU underlined the importance of distance education and e-learning and developing a university-wide research policy for improving quality standards.

In respect to the status of distance education institutes and the EUA report on EMU, proposing change-oriented action for the development of working practice is crucial (Hubbard and Power, 1993). Being a tutor and researcher in the Distance Education Institute at EMU, my work-based project was intended to propose this change and development.

### **1.2 Significance of My Work Based Research Project**

The importance of the EUA review in my work context, along with my educational background and professional experience provide this research with both institutional and personal significance with my institutional role enabling me to carry out the research in depth.

*Reasons for conducting my research project*

In 2004, EMU initiated a series of university wide reforms aimed at developing its quality to the highest European standards in all area from research, learning, and academic programs, to management structures; at broadening and increasing its work in the service of local and regional development and quality culture; and at promoting peace, tolerance and academic principles throughout Cyprus.

Under these initiatives, EMU has made strong proactive efforts to promote and develop academic cooperation and collaboration with both Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot universities, as well as with regional, European and other international institutions of higher education.

As the EUA is the representative organisation of European Universities and the main voice of the higher education community of Europe, quality monitoring of teaching activities, research activities, student performance and external relations becomes essential for EMU. In 2005, after joining the EUA as a full individual member, EMU took a major step in its commitment to the European Higher Education Area and the quality standards of the Bologna Process, by requesting an external evaluation from the EUA.

This reinforced EMU's commitment to prepare action plans for development. According to the EUA report, the capacity for change of EMU was stressed and major suggestions for actions were underlined.

Considering EMU's limited resources for facing the challenge of globalization and the Lisbon objectives in terms of the development of a vibrant society of knowledge in Europe, the review team considered it to be especially important for EMU to develop a university-wide research policy. Research objectives should be part of the university strategic plan, thus defining the areas where

research efforts should be concentrated. This would mean a clear set of priorities that should also take into account the modalities by which research cross-fertilizes the educational process.

The EUA report stressed the importance of distance education, emphasising that using such tools for training could alleviate EMU's problems with the rapid increase of student numbers it had witnessed over the previous few years. Such a policy could and should play a key role in developing a lifelong learning culture at EMU and in the region (<http://www.emu.edu.tr/EUA-report.pdf>, 2007).

Conducting research projects about developments in distance education practice is thus crucial in strategic planning at the university. Therefore, my project stresses the changes in the organizational structure of Distance Education Institute and the pedagogical implications of the online teaching-learning process for the benefit of the university in relation to the requirements of EUA standards. Taking into consideration the EUA report, institutions within the university started their strategic planning process. The Distance Education Institute in which I have an active role as a senior instructor, is one of the institutions at EMU. It began offering online education in campus and distance mode n 2000.

Currently, the Institute offers online courses within the campus. Due to legal and infrastructural problems, it could not implement its two year diploma program in Information Management through distance learning during the 2008-2009 Academic Year. However, there were attempts to open new online courses within the campus, including a master degree program in the School of Tourism and Hospitality.

For the 2008-2009 Academic Year, the Institute staff comprised the director, one technical staff member, and thirteen tutors, including a director and five tutors

from Tourism, one tutor from Architecture, one from Economics, five from the English Preparatory School, and one from the General Education Department. The main mission of the institute for its courses was to produce graduates who have excellent computer skills and know how to locate information using the Internet, to classify and convey information, and to use information efficiently. In addition to the distance education program, departments affiliated to the Institute provide online courses based on blended-learning within the university. The Institute reflects the vision and mission of EMU by aiming to promote the life-long learning process and develop quality and global standards. Hence the EUA report provided a foundation for research projects for the development of the institution.

#### *My research interest*

Having completed my MEd., I decided to continue my professional development in the Faculty of Education and Distance Education Institute as the experience and knowledge I had gained throughout the MEd. courses, dissertation and experience of being a research assistant, had stimulated my interest in working in both the theoretical and practical sides of distance education.

My position as lecturer and researcher in the Distance Education Institute and the Faculty of Education provided extensive experience and opportunities for learning. As well as developing specific skills, I have also increased my understanding of distance education practices regarding communication, organizational change and also I became aware of the need to consider the role of tutors and the need to create an environment of active participation in constructing knowledge. I further developed my research experience through collaborative research projects with colleagues, preparing and presenting

research papers in international conferences and for publication in the field of educational technology. Experience as a peer reviewer in social citation indexed journals also extended my knowledge and contributed to my critical understanding of educational research. These experiences all enabled me to further my understanding of potential areas of research in educational technology, and how to put this research into practice in practical and realistic ways in my own context.

### *Contextualizing my work-based project and my role*

The cultural and research context for my work is key to the rationale of my research project. North Cyprus is one part of a developing country on a small island. It is a country that has economical and political restrictions and instability within its structure. This leads people to make considerable efforts to develop themselves through higher education, even though resources and employment opportunities are limited. Universities thus become a powerful tool, and adaptation to change, and innovation through strategic planning and the exploration and development of new paradigms is essential.

There are seven universities in North Cyprus with a variety of different programmes and student profiles. EMU is a state university that was established in 1979. EMU offers programs fully recognized by Council of Higher Education in Turkey. As an international university, it makes considerable efforts to reach European University Association standards, as well as meeting the standards of the Council of Higher Education in Turkey. Having completed its physical infrastructure, the campus spreads over an area of 2200 acres.

Comprising 7 Faculties, 2 Schools and the English Preparatory School, the University has excellent campus facilities, and a multicultural environment with

students coming from 68 countries. Highly qualified faculty members come from 35 different nations. This variety of cultures naturally impacts on teaching philosophy and communication in traditional and online courses. The vision of EMU that has been developed accordingly is based on student profile and expectations for the future:

- Inspiring and educating students to become critical thinkers and autonomous individuals and personalities who will contribute to the development of their societies on the basis of knowledge, ethical and professional responsibility, open-mindedness and personal integrity.
- Promoting cultural diversity and understanding both in the university and in society
- Contributing to the welfare of society and to sustainable development and peaceful coexistence in the region.
- Playing a proactive role in the economic, social, and cultural development of the country by according the greatest priority to academic freedom and achieving the highest standards in education and research.
- Being a democratic, transparent and autonomous institution.

EMU's mission follows from the vision as shown below:

(See EMU Policy at  
<http://www.emu.edu.tr/mevzuat/Eng-Rules05/administration/str-plan.doc>)

- To offer an academic environment that attracts and retains a highly qualified and diverse body of students and faculty regardless of their ideological, political, cultural and social background.
- To create a stimulating intellectual environment that fosters values of respect, empathy, and ethical responsibility.

- To encourage the participation of all the university's members and their organizations in the formulation of its short-term and long-term policies.
- To provide an environment in which its members can pursue reasoned analysis and engage in critical thinking, and to make a conscious effort to encourage diversity while uniting the university's staff and students in pursuing the core values of a university: acquiring, creating, and applying knowledge.
- To strive to be an institution which is transparent in its decisions and activities and which efficiently implements its programs and policies
- To develop close relationships with and provide knowledge, services and technology to all communities in the broader Mediterranean region without bias.
- To make intense academic and social efforts to initiate, support and encourage solutions for environmental protection in Cyprus and in the broader Mediterranean region.

Projects for the improvement of distance education at EMU are one aspect of the attempt to attain these quality standards. It was important also for my action plan to be designed within the context of the EUA as well as my work and research context.

My role as 'worker researcher' was integral to the project. In terms of the personal qualities that I was able to bring to the Institute, enthusiasm, empathy, a strategic outlook and strong communication skills empowered me in the design and delivery of the research project. As far as academic qualities are concerned, research into educational technology, insights from international conferences, international memberships in the field of distance education, my educational

background, and work experience contributed to my potential to help achieve organizational change in my institution. As a researcher with in-depth knowledge and experience of distance education at EMU, my work based project was supportive of both the Distance Education Institute and the university in relation to EUA standards.

### **1.3 Carrying out My Work based Research Project**

My project encompasses the role of organizational change in improving quality with particular consideration of online tutors' roles and online pedagogy. My own dual role as both worker-researcher and colleague was beneficial both for my own and others' professional development in terms of feeding the quality improvement of the Distance Education Institute and the university within the accumulation and synergy of researcher knowledge and experience.

#### *Aim of my work based research project*

Communication practice provided a rationale for structuring both the content of my project and the research process. Communication practice is considered a process in which participants and researchers share their ideas, information, opinions and feelings (Ellonen and Kirsimarja, Puumalainen, 2008; Ozcelik, Langton, Aldrich, 2008). Further to this, it promotes the ability to work in groups and with people from different backgrounds to develop mutual understanding in knowledge construction. (Welch and Jackson, 2007).

Communication is a discipline which includes interpersonal, small group and organizational communication. My research project concentrated on how participants enhance communication through negotiation through sharing ideas, information, opinions and feelings and how this contributed to communication practice and the collaborative work of online tutors in order to develop the



organizational climate and to perform their roles effectively at the Distance Education Institute. (Meyer, 2002).

In particular, my project focuses on the changing roles of the tutors, building and raising awareness of the necessity for a new pedagogy in the online context. Further to this, it focuses on creating awareness on the importance of social presence and communication in constructing knowledge within online courses.

My project is based on reflective practice, a process of enhancing professional knowledge by thinking in action within educational practice (Schön, 1991). For the research focus, the director of Tourism and five tutors, one tutor from Architecture, one tutor from Economics, five tutors from the English Preparatory School, one tutor from General Education Department and thirty five students volunteered to participate in my action research. Of these participants, three had a background in Educational Technology, and the others expertise in Computer Engineering, English, Architecture, Tourism and Economics.

In my project, action research is used as a self-reflective, self-critical approach to understanding and improving curriculum, teaching, and learning (Saito *et al.*, 2008). It is a form of professional self-improvement that is initiated, designed and conducted by practitioners not as an individualistic activity but as a 'group activity' with all views taken as a contribution to understanding the situation (Bustingorry, 2008).

Thus in this approach, I became a researcher as learner, with personal development coming through improving understanding of practice (reflection) and with an emphasis on the researcher as a collaborator, actively seeking the validation of practice and knowledge (reflexivity) (Verma and Mallick, 1999; Pring, 2000; Johnson, 2002; Mills, 2003; Ledwith, 2007).

I decided to carry out this type of research as I believed it would allow me to gain the knowledge and experience needed to develop a coherent philosophy of lifelong learning. Furthermore, using a “real setting and my national agenda as my research context” through action research to put theoretical aspects of distance education into practice would reveal both the strengths and shortcomings of my research.

This research also provided an opportunity to the Distance Education Institute to design an action plan based on the EUA and through this, the Doctorate in Professional Studies (DProf) became a milestone for me to combine work based learning with research in terms of my employment and professional development.

#### **1.4 My Work Based Research Project Outcomes and Limitations**

My project meets the needs of functional units of EMU which are the Rector’s Office, the Distance Education Institute and tutors and the student body. By the end of the research project, the following outcomes were anticipated:

- ✓ Different tutors from different departments and backgrounds will gain pedagogical knowledge and awareness about online education
- ✓ The competencies of online tutors and students would be developed through training for personal and professional development
- ✓ Collaboration and negotiation amongst online tutors would develop collegiality and critical friendship thus developing organizational knowledge and development
- ✓ Strong communication would be created within the Distance Education Institute to create a positive organizational climate and culture

- ✓ Enhancing the quality mission of the EMU regarding Distance Education Institute practices within the EUA framework
- ✓ Enhancing the reputation of the Distance Education Institute inside and outside the university
- ✓ Providing a handbook on how to teach online course at the Distance Education Institute at EMU
- ✓ Benefitting both my institution in general and the departments within the university

Although my project has significant implications for change and development, I faced also a number of challenges and limitations.

Combining the dual role of researcher and worker, with the workload involved was one significant challenge. Further, the participants were experiencing action research for the first time. This required a sustained effort to develop the knowledge and skills needed in this type of research. In addition, internal participants were novices in online pedagogy. Cultural factors were another limitation and included such factors as resistance to change and development at the beginning of the research, difficulty in expressing feelings and ideas at focus group events, and punctuality in organizing trainings and interviews. These were the main challenges that I had to successfully manage.

In summary, this chapter discusses the rationale of my project, its significance, how I carried out my project, and limitations. The following chapter details key definitions, aims, objectives, research questions and a literature review.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH STATEMENT AND QUESTIONS, LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter consists of terms of reference covering definitions of terms, aim and objectives, research questions and literature review. The first part of the chapter covers definitions of terms, the aim of my project and its specific objectives and research questions. Following the aim and objectives of the research project, the second part of the chapter reviews previous conceptual and empirical research on the role of tutors in online education in helping students construct knowledge.

This part starts by reviewing the role of communication in organisations. It then examines the role of tutors in online learning with reference to different authors' perspectives. The literature review pulls these arguments together and emphasises the need to encourage the active participation of students in constructing knowledge. In addition, a review of the roles of tutors in facilitating communication in collaborative learning to construct knowledge is carried out.

Particular attention is given to collaborative learning, active participation and social barriers in an online context. The final section of the chapter includes a discussion of the literature in this regard.

#### **2.2 Definition of Terms**

The terms described below are the key determinants which frame the rationale for my research project and underpin the action taken. In particular 'communication practice' is a critical concept for understanding the nature of my project.

In my project, 'communication practice' is strongly related to mutual understanding among online tutors and the researcher. This is achieved through negotiation, reflection and knowledge sharing and enhancing positive working relations in constructing knowledge.

In short, communication practice concerns the ability to work in collaboration in constructing knowledge. It covers such aspects as organizational communication based on small group discussions and negotiations in order to improve the sharing of knowledge and experience. My research project concentrated on how tutors as participants engage in negotiation and reflection to create a positive organizational climate and how they perform their roles within the online learning teaching process to construct organizational, professional and pedagogical knowledge through the exchange of ideas, information and experiences.

The following terms should also guide the reader in the interpretation of the main themes of this research:

*Communication in Organization:* People working together to achieve individual or collective goals through some form of communication. The survival of an organization depends on individuals and groups who are able to maintain among themselves effective and continuing relationships.

*Competence:* The quality of being adequately or well qualified physically and intellectually.

*Facilitator:* An individual whose job is to help to manage a process of information exchange. The facilitator's role is to help with how the discussion is proceeding. Providing formative feedback, offering technical guidance,

fostering community, and communicating “from the side” in a way that encourages learners to construct knowledge together.

*Managerial Role:* Setting the agenda, objectives, procedures and rules of the educational activities.

*Online Education:* The acquisition of knowledge and skills through mediated information and instruction; encompasses all technologies and supports the pursuit of lifelong learning.

*Online Pedagogy:* Encompassing the approach, the methods and strategies, and the underlying epistemology of an approach to teaching in an online context.

*Online Socialization:* Familiarizing and providing bridges between cultural, social and learning environments.

*Online Teaching:* Activities that impart knowledge or skills in an online context.

*Organizational Climate:* People’s perceptions and attitudes about the organization. Attributes of independence of action and behaviour of an organization’s members, commitment of organization’s members to organizational goals, confidence, dynamism, spontaneity in work relations, reduced presence of personal and emotional tensions in organization, support and stimulus to develop new ideas and respond rapidly to new opportunities.

*Quality Improvements:* A formal approach to the analysis of performance and systematic efforts to improve it. The continuous study and improvement of a process, system or organization. Measuring undertaken in order to increase efficiency of actions and procedures with the purpose of achieving additional benefits for the organization and its users.

*Participatory Action Research:* Addressing a specific problem within a school or community in order to improve practice by empowering individuals and groups to improve their lives and bring about social change.

*Pedagogical Role:* Designing and delivering an appropriate educational experience, encouraging participation and fostering deep learning and reflection.

*Professional Development:* Increasing the knowledge and skills of individuals to enhance the quality of performance, to ensure an improvement on the personal and professional front.

*Role:* The actions and activities assigned to or required or expected of a person or group.

*Social Role:* Creating a learning community that supports and encourages students, monitoring progress and participation.

*Technical Role:* Making participants comfortable with the technology and ultimately to make the technology transparent.

*Tutor:* One who teaches another in a one-on-one or small-group interaction.

### **2.3 Aim and Objectives of My Work based Research Project**

The main aim of my research project was to investigate the role of communication practices in the Distance Education Institute and to examine the roles of tutors in facilitating communication for constructing knowledge. My project thus suggests an action plan for the development of the Distance Education Institute based on EUA Standards and focusing specifically on the role of communication and the roles of tutors in constructing knowledge.

Since EMU had adopted a quality mission, and considering the significance of distance education in this regard (as stressed by the EUA report), it was clear that

distance education at EMU, which was still in its infancy, was ideally placed to be the subject of an enthusiastic and energetically administered research project.

As the mode of the Distance Education Institute requires a collaborative environment and a strong communication ethos beyond the centralized management system, it was essential to consider the profiles of both tutors and students with regard to the development of the Distance Education Institute in terms of quality.

The significance of my research project and action plan derived from the following objectives:

- ✓ To raise awareness about the relevance of communication and organizational climate in the Distance Education Institute and about the role of social interaction in online learning and teaching.
- ✓ To provide training on tutor roles and raise tutor awareness about their roles in the online learning and teaching process.
- ✓ To enhance online socialization of students.
- ✓ To create an organizational culture in the Distance Education Institute by focusing on communication practices between tutors and among students.

My research project aimed to investigate the impact of communication practices on organizational change and development. In addition to this, it aimed to create awareness about online pedagogy and tutor roles in the online learning and teaching process.



## **2.4 Research Questions**

The focus of my project investigates the awareness of the Distance Education Institute of the relevance of communication flow within organization and the roles of tutors in facilitating communication in order to construct knowledge

The basic research questions are as follows:

1. To what extent does the Distance Education Institute manage relevant communication flow in terms of development of organizational climate?
2. To what extent do online tutors have awareness of their roles in the online learning-teaching process?
3. To what extent do online tutors perform their roles within the online learning and teaching process?
4. How do tutors facilitate online socialization for active participation in constructing knowledge?
5. What roles do tutors play in facilitating communication in collaborative learning to overcome social barriers and thus contribute to knowledge construction?

## **2.5 Literature Review**

This section explores the relevant literature. The main issues are the role of communication in organisations, the roles of tutors in online learning, the active participation of students in constructing knowledge, and the roles of tutors in facilitating communication to construct that knowledge.

### ***Role of Communication in Organisation***

In the face of intense international competition, rapid technology evolution, and maturing expectations, innovation is a primary focus for organizations (Daly *et al.*, 2003; Akkirman and Harris, 2005). Thus, openness to innovation is crucial

for the development of organizations (Panuwatwanich *et al.*, 2008), and this means also considering the innovativeness of the culture and its orientation toward innovation since this will impact on the perceived need for new ideas and action within the institution itself (Montes *et al.*, 2003; Ismail, 2005).

The role of communication within organizational change and development is very important. Further, the relationship between organizational climate and perceptions of support for innovation needs to be analyzed in relation to the effect of the different dimensions of climate on the organizations' innovative performance and competitive advantage (Elving, 2005; Ellonen *et al.*, 2008).

Kangis and Williams (2000) provide insights into features of organizational climate through various categories which embody members' collective perceptions about their organization with respect to such dimensions as autonomy, trust, cohesiveness, support, recognition, innovation and fairness. They look at how these collective perceptions are produced by member interaction, serve as a basis for interpreting situations, reflect the prevalent norms and attitudes of an organisation's culture and act as a source of influence for shaping behaviour.

Ismail (2005) sees organizational climate as an attribute of the organization, a conglomerate of attitudes, feelings and behaviours which characterize life in organizations and exists independently of the perceptions and understandings of the members of the organizations. On the other hand, the study of Chen and Huang (2007) puts an emphasis within organizational climate of structure in the construction of knowledge. An essential element of this project is the attempt to underline that social interaction is essential for the construction of knowledge within organizations.

A positive organizational climate is characterized by support and cohesion. Strong cohesion, open communication and freedom to express opinions play a great role in promoting successful innovation. (Ng *et al.*, 2006; Ozcelik *et al.*, 2008).

Technological innovations have and are radically altering education, training and employment patterns around the world. Ongoing improvement of skills will underpin innovation and enterprise in the economy and society (McPherson and Nunes, 2006). Increased use of quality systems in the higher education context has made a profound impact in the areas of administration, teaching and research (Mizikaci, 2006; Redmond *et al.*, 2008).

Thomas (2007) discusses quality improvements in higher education with regard to the use of distance education practices as strategic innovations. Likewise, this study explores flexible learning and the blend between face-to-face campus style learning and interactive e-learning technologies for both expanding knowledge sharing among staff and expanding market share through distance education practices. Innovation practices, organizational climate and open communication are interrelated frames for enhancing quality performances of universities as they seek to attain such objectives.

The study of Nystrom *et al.* (2002) argues that organizations adopt technological innovations to help themselves achieve a competitive advantage. In this respect, organizational climate plays a key role in promoting the desirability of innovation and the need for adaptation to change.

As developments in organizational communication in universities are closely related to rapid developments in information and communication technologies,

there is now a substantial literature suggesting ways in which internal communications can improve the likelihood of an organization being successful.

It is indicated that when predicting performance of an organization the presence of good interpersonal relationships between workers is a prime indicator of performance. Many changes in universities as organizations are based on developments to communication systems. (Robson and Tourish, 2005; Vries and Diana, 2005).

In this respect, organisational communication is defined as:

“the process by which information is exchanged and understood by two or more people, usually with the intent to motivate or influence behaviour”.

This project aims to understand this process more fully and then develop ways to improve the mechanics of communicating in organizations by focusing on the barriers to effective communication within institutions (Kelly, 2000; Peng and Littelljohn, 2001; Welch and Jackson, 2007).

In the information age, universities’ assets include both knowledge and interrelationships. This project focuses on how the one supports the other, and how strong communication among educators can lead to knowledge construction (Barrett, 2002).

Universities expand their practice through research projects and clearly project management becomes a key strategy for innovation (Arca and Prado, 2008; Smulders *et al.*, 2008). This is a social process in which many educators collaborate to work for innovation at their universities. Hence, communication is a substantial part of collaborative project design and essential to the development of professionalism (Chen *et al.*, 2006). As professionalism is regarded as a knowledge based occupation, the need for developing and attaining standards has increased for all in today’s competitive environment. Standards create a

professional environment of “best practice” procedures and they enable organizations to confidently create systems, policies and procedures, maintain autonomy from vested interest groups and assure high operational quality that leads to exceptional records and information management performance. In this respect, teaching too requires standards that encompass the principles and guidelines to be accepted worldwide (Krishnaveni and Anitha, 2007).

In order to attain these standards, communication is the vital tool. As with most organizations, educational establishments engage in a wide variety of communications on a daily basis. In this project, communication is the process by which individuals share meaning as defined as a transactional process between two or more parties whereby meaning is exchanged through the intentional use of symbols.

Communication is the process most central to the success or failure of an organization (Hunt *et al.*, 2000). It is central to the development and maintenance of positive working relationships, harmony and trust (Harrison and Doerfel, 2006). It is argued also that the construction of knowledge is the most important capability for building and sustaining competitive advantages in institutions (Salmador and Bueno, 2007). Through knowledge and understanding of the communication process, educators are the actors likely to achieve the objectives of influencing attitudes, knowledge and behaviour and thus successfully realise that construction of knowledge (Holm, 2006; Moore *et al.*, 2008; Issa and Haddad, 2008).

## *Roles of Tutors in Online Education*

### *Online Education*

Distance education is defined as: education imparted where the learner is physically separated from the teacher (Rumble, 1986); as a planned and guided learning experience (Holmberg, 1995) as consisting of a two-way structure distinct from traditional classroom instruction (Keegan, 1988), characterised by a higher level of independence or “learner control” (Holmberg, 1995).

Baynton (1992) has developed a model to examine independence, competence and support. It could be argued that online education provides such a high level of interaction that the “distance” is necessarily smaller (Williams *et al.*, 2005; Adams, 2007). In my project, online education is seen as extending beyond the classroom and consists of material and communication delivered over the internet directly to the learner’s PC.

This mode has experienced significant growth in recent years appealing to employers, learners and academia and providing benefits in terms of continuous learning, time saved and reduced travel costs. Online education has become a genuine alternative form of education in the academic and corporate worlds (Volery and Lord, 2000).

With increasing numbers of students returning to higher education for training, retraining, and the pursuit of advanced degrees, online business-related and/or distance educational programmes are providing institutions with numerous opportunities to increase access and meet the demands of a growing and demographically changing student population. Online education addresses the building of collaborative relationships, global thinking and the use of resources. By taking advantage of online education, institutions can reach new markets,

diversify programme offerings, increase visibility, strengthen decreasing areas of enrolment, provide convenient ways to engage alumni, and expand opportunities for existing students (Zhao, 2003; Smith and Rupp, 2004; Mitchell and Honore, 2007).

Muirhead (2000) defines online education as a process in which network technologies such as the Internet are used to make connections among students, teachers, and educational materials. Universities have now started to use online education as a strategic initiative (Eisenbarth, 2003; Hartman *et al.*, 2007), and this in turn has introduced a strong level of user control of learning that in itself has led to further changes in the way people and institutions work (Schofield *et al.*, 2001; Newton *et al.*, 2002; Sonwalkar, 2008).

The rapid growth in the number of online education courses and programs has had a profound impact on the ideas and beliefs about teaching and learning (Whittaker, 2007). Uhomoibhi (2006) argues that new teaching cultures are consequently required.

Notions of knowledge economy and knowledge work have become predominant metaphors for characterizing the workplace. Solving novel problems for which no previous knowledge exists, thinking critically, learning quickly and responding flexibly to a rapidly changing environment and technology, working in distributed, culturally diverse teams, building knowledge from different sources and different perspectives, and applying it in an efficient way are being increasingly identified as critical workplace competencies (Margaryan, 2008).

In online education, tutors have faced steep learning curves in terms of how they adopt this challenging mode of teaching (Taylor, 2002). In this respect, the study of Zapalska and Brozik (2006) emphasises that to teach more effectively in

online courses, tutors need to know more about differences in learning and how to address the variety of learning styles found in their students.

Following this argument, tutors who know about differences in learning styles are better able to modify their teaching strategies and techniques in online education. Therefore, it is crucial to stress that tutors have a great role to play in facilitating communication in online learning (Michinow and Michinow, 2008).

### *Roles of Tutors*

Developments in information technology, the means for online education and training have been greatly enhanced. This requires new activities and develops relationships with both the tutors and the various participants involved in the process. In addition, new skills will have to be acquired because of multi-faceted features in open and distance learning. In this respect, competencies can be applied to tutors by focusing on their roles in online learning (Julien, 2005).

Electronic teaching through internet is becoming established in the practice of educational institutions and this no doubt enhances the professional developments of tutors (Kennedy, 2005). However, as online teaching is different from face-to-face instruction, it requires different skill and role sets for the tutors.

It is this shaping of online teaching practice that is considered in my project. In order to undertake tutors' responsibilities in an effective way, online tutors need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to perform the tasks for online learning (Salter, 2003; Burd and Burchanan, 2004; Henderson and Bradey, 2008).



Grasha (2000) describes five teaching styles. In this respect, teachers tend to exhibit specific teaching styles that reflect their beliefs as to how individuals learn:

- Expert. Possesses knowledge and expertise that is communicated effectively to students to ensure they are challenged and well prepared for future experiences.
- Formal authority. Relies on position and power to engage students in a structured, acceptable program of learning.
- Personal model. Will model behaviour that students should emulate in order for learning to occur.
- Facilitator. Encourages student-teacher interactions and develops independent learning activities in a consultative fashion.
- Delegator. Acts as a consultant and resource person as students develop into self-directed, independent learners.

There is much research conducted about the awareness of tutor on their roles within online education (Hiltz 1994; Berge, 1995; Harasim *et al.*, 1995; Berge and Collins, 2000; Elbaum *et al.*, 2002; Salmon, 2002; Easton, 2003; Gerrard, 2005). Berge (1995) classifies the roles of online tutors as technical, managerial, pedagogical and social.

Berge and Collins (2000) on the other hand describes the roles of tutors as fire-fighter, facilitator, administrator, promoter, helper and participant. Harasim *et al.* (1995) and Hiltz (1994) meanwhile see the roles of tutors as planner, group structurer, facilitator and guide.

Salmon (2002) discusses the competencies of online tutors, singling out being confident, constructive, developmental, facilitating, knowledge sharing and creative. Understanding of the online process, technical skills, online communication skills, content expertise and personal characteristics are quality elements and also characteristics of online tutors for effective online teaching.

A five stage framework for online learning, teaching and roles of tutors was proposed by Salmon (2002) which both gives an insight into the facilitation of online learning and knowledge construction and also to this research.

**Stage 1                      Access and motivation**

- Ensure that the on-line group is set up with a welcome message
- Ensure students know how to access the on-line group

**Stage 2                      On-line socialization**

- Lead a round of introductions with, perhaps, an on-line ice-breaker
- Welcome new team members or late arrivals
- Provide a structure for getting started e.g. agreement of group rules, Netiquette
- If individuals break the agreed group netiquette then tackle them (either privately or through the discussion group)
- Wherever possible avoid playing 'ping pong' with individual group members and ask other people for their opinions and ideas
- Encourage quieter members and browsers (sometimes called 'lurkers' or 'browsers') to join in
- Provide summaries of on-line discussions. This is called weaving and involves summarizing and synthesising the content of multiple responses in a virtual group.

**Stage 3                      Information exchange**

- Provide highly structured activities at the start of the group life
- Encourage participation
- Ask questions
- Encourage team members to post short messages
- Allocate on-line roles to individual members e.g. to provide a summary of a particular thread of discussion
- Close of threads as and when appropriate
- Encourage the on-line group to develop its own life and history. Welcome shared language, metaphors, rituals and jokes.

**Stage 4                      Knowledge construction**

- Provide more open activities
- Facilitate the learning process
- Pose questions for the group to consider
- Encourage group members to question theory and practice e.g. links (or lack of connection) between theory and work-based practice
- Encourage the group to develop its own life and history. Welcome shared language, metaphors, rituals and jokes.

**Stage 5                      Development**

- Encourage group members to lead discussions
- Encourage group members to transfer their skills to other areas of their work

- Support individual 'risk'
- Encourage reflection on different learning processes (individual and group)

Barker (2002) suggests that online tutors need major pedagogical, technical and organizational skills as a pre-requisite for effective online tutoring. The pedagogical skill is related to the ability to design and create teaching and learning materials for online use by researching topics, knowledge structuring, designing individualised self-study tasks, designing group work activities, formulating assessment strategies, mentoring, counselling, advising, marking, monitoring and giving feedback.

Technical skills are related to the ability to use a range of different software tools, using electronic mail, creating, managing, participating in asynchronous conferences, designing, creating, controlling real-time chat rooms, using a word processor, spreadsheet, database, using web page authoring tools, using special purpose software. This skill is the most heavily used mechanism for communication.

Organizational skills are related to the ability to organise activities including selecting and organizing cohorts of students for group activities, maintaining online conferences in logical fashion, structuring and maintaining students' demographic data, collecting and archiving, maintaining personal teaching resources and maintaining documents templates (Barker, 2002).

Maor (2003) points out that an interactive and collaborative learning environment can be evolved by creating a student centred approach where the tutor takes the role of facilitator and the students engage in peer learning to construct knowledge. In this respect, Maor (2003) characterises the roles of tutors using the the metaphor of four hats. These four hats are pedagogical,

social, managerial and technical and are intended to promote peer learning and reflective thinking to construct knowledge in online learning. Similarly, Smet *et al.* (2006) has framed the roles of online tutors as motivators, informers and knowledge constructors.

*Roles of Tutors in Facilitating Communication to Construct Knowledge*

Online learning is a new frontier not just pedagogically and technologically but also organizationally. The study of Wang (2004) emphasizes that students' online visibility affects their performance on certain tasks that require more social presence, such as communication and collaboration with others. Wallace (2003) states that:

“Interaction has been used to understand how students construct knowledge in online education environment”, p.247.

In this respect, Salmon (2002) discusses knowledge building of online students through tutor support providing interaction and active participation in the online learning environment. It is underlined that access, motivation, online socialization, information exchange, knowledge construction and development are all components of the pyramid for analyzing and describing how tutors can support online learning.

Active student participation fosters construction of knowledge and creates a social presence and the nature and content of participation impacts on both satisfaction and learning (Jones and Issroff, 2005). Thereby, student collaboration and the valuable discussions that can emerge from this collaboration enhance construction of knowledge (Wallace, 2003; Bosley, 2006). Online learning requires tutors to possess a range of practical technical skills such as the use of e-mail, discussion forums, chat facilities, video conferencing tools and a general awareness of web site development tools in order to facilitate

communication in constructing knowledge. In this respect, online learning relies on components of communication, collaboration, engagement and interactivity (Treleaven and Kecmanovic, 2001). Effective interactivity through communication, involvement, control and adaptation is important for the effectiveness of online and flexible learning (Meyer, 2002).

In addition, facilitation is crucial in managing communication for constructing knowledge. Facilitation skills are the methods used by the tutors to enhance interpersonal communication within the on-line learning environment (Packham *et al.*, 2006). Anderson *et al.* (2001) state that facilitation is critical to the success of an online course as it fosters and maintains the interest and motivation of students. It is stressed that facilitator role includes engaging the learner in the learning process, questioning and listening skills, providing direction and support, managing on-line discussions, building on-line groups and developing on-line relationships. Students also require some socialization so that they can communicate effectively with their peers and tutors.

Online facilitation is an effective pedagogical strategy to increase online interaction and enhance online learning (Chang, 2001). The study of Chang (2001) discusses types of facilitation in such areas as assignments and grades, network access, online discussion, group activities and course materials. It is argued that students collaboratively construct knowledge and negotiate meaning through socially interactive conversation among participants and tutors in the online community (Wang, 2007). In this respect tutors serve not only as facilitators but also as co-participants who construct knowledge with students (Lu and Jeng, 2007).

Wang (2007) reports four common types of facilitation in online discussions: intellectual, social, managerial and technical. The intellectual or pedagogical role of facilitators is to help group members achieve predetermined learning objectives, such as understanding critical concepts or building subject knowledge.

One main purpose of online discussions is to help students construct knowledge through social interaction. It can even be stated that social interaction within online learning is essential to knowledge construction (Marra *et al.*, 2004).

In online learning, collaboration enhances learning by encouraging individuals to exercise, verify, solidify and improve their mental models through discussion and information sharing (Strijbos *et al.*, 2007). This makes learning a social process (Yang *et al.*, 2006). Within this process, social presence and interaction are essential in constructing knowledge and the role of online tutors in accompanying this key to this research project (Bruyn, 2004; Lightfoot, 2006).

The tutor-facilitator must encourage participants to plan and control their own learning process. In addition, tutors must also invite discussion and collaboration and encourage the learners to apply this information. Thus, they are learning from their own experiences and their learning becomes more personal and valuable (McFadzean and McKenzie, 2001; Mazzolini and Maddison, 2007).

Chua (2002) also discusses the role of social interaction in knowledge creation. He argues that online learning provides a facilitative environment for establishing peer support, developing academic dialogue and socialization. The study of Martinez *et al.* (2007) again stresses the key role of the facilitator in building up a positive, constructive, sharing and motivating online learning atmosphere among learners. It is emphasized that students need to interact with

their peers, and facilitator to share and contrast learning experiences in order to consolidate their knowledge of theories and concepts.

Student interaction, together with student-facilitator interaction, is one of the methodological aspects to be considered in on-line learning based on a student-centred philosophy. Continuous student-teacher interaction is of great importance in order to avoid the sensation of isolation and loneliness and to guide the students in the learning process. In this respect, innovation and creativity are needed to facilitate peer interaction, support and socialization in the online learning process. Briefly, it can be stated that the process of knowledge construction, and developing collective understanding relies on social interaction through collaborative learning and the role of online tutors (Kimber *et al.*, 2007).

As collaborative learning is the interaction between individual and learning activities, shared knowledge building can be enhanced by tutor's facilitation through online communication (Fung, 2004; Puntambekar, 2006). Arbaugh and Hwang (2006) conducted research that suggests the need for ongoing process interventions and interactions by the tutor in promoting discovery and understanding of concepts and knowledge by students. With regard to this, behaviours such as encouraging and acknowledging student participation, creating channels for effective dialogue, keeping students on task, making students aware, enable the tutor to monitor interactions and guide as appropriate. Thus the central role of the tutors comes in the processes of developing student knowledge and guiding students in knowledge discovery efforts.

Finegold and Cooke (2006) emphasise the importance of understanding the attitudes, experiences and interaction dynamics of students and highlight the significance of group member participation, collegiality and familiarity among

group members. However, the importance of tutors' presence in online groups is stressed and active participation highlighted as the most important motivating factor influencing the success of online groups.

### Conclusion

Higher education institutions involved in quality improvements will often actively seek to engineer service differentiation to gain competitive advantage. In this regard, distance education has become increasingly used as a method for expanding capacity and relations with external environments. Consequently, there is an intensified need to consider distance education institutes' performances in terms of both their pedagogical and organizational aspects and propose change-oriented actions accordingly.

The knowledge age is characterized by challenge and change. The impact of technology in the competitive arena necessitates adapting to change by increasing knowledge capacity and seeking to improve quality. Technology links people around the globe together and technological developments have shifted educational thinking towards the combination of flexible, lifelong learning (Roes, 2001). With these changes, education characterizes its future as being interactive, on-demand, learner-centred, authentic and learner constructed (Simonson *et al.*, 2003). Universities have started to practice online learning and teaching in order to reach the contemporary standards of education driven by the notion of quality.

Quality is viewed as "transformative", in terms of a qualitative change of form, to include cognitive transcendence, which in education is believed to be an ongoing process of transformation that includes empowerment and enhancement of the customer (Sahney, Banwet, Karunes, 2004).



In this case, implementation of online learning and teaching practice is one of the crucial factors in gaining value addition in educational institutions. The dynamic and interactive aspects of quality in education refer to quality education that educational cultures characterize by increased customer satisfaction through continuous improvement in which all employees and students actively participate. The continuous improvement of the dynamic and interactive aspects of quality in education relies on the facilitating of communication networks.

Developing a culture within educational institutions is strongly related to the amount of communication and the manner in which this communication is exercised through the involvement of the participants. Therefore, a constructive communication climate is essential. This refers to the atmosphere in an organization regarding accepted communication behaviour by focusing on information flow.

Based on descriptions of communication climates within educational institutions, it is to be expected that a constructive communication climate will positively influence knowledge sharing and the construction of knowledge (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2004). As learner satisfaction based on active participation is one of the proposed instruments to enhance quality, it is therefore crucial to examine satisfaction in e-learning by considering communication facilitation.

Communication plays an important role in changes in teaching and learning experiences. Increasingly, changes in information technology and communication are generating and requiring distance and online education. (Meyer, 2002). As online education relies on the acquisition of knowledge and skills through mediated information and instruction, it encompasses all technologies and supports the pursuit of lifelong learning (Gilbert, 2001).

The study of Tynjala and Hakkinen (2005) examines the importance of developing innovative pedagogical practices by engaging in deeper level learning and interaction. The increasing focus on creating powerful learning and communication environments by integrating collaborative learning is also emphasised. The challenges identified include the lack of personalization, the lack of collaboration and interactivity. The study seeks to meet those challenges through both individual and organizational learning and the development of e-learning solutions, stressing both individual reflection and collaborative knowledge building, the integration of theoretical knowledge with participants' experience, encouragement of collaboration and knowledge exchange between different groups of people and having a real dialogue (Tynjala and Hakkinen, 2005).

Online education is defined as an approach to learning and teaching that utilizes new technology to communicate and collaborate in an educational context (Piezon and Donaldson, 2005).

The process of online communication enables the learners to actively construct their own perspectives which they can communicate to a small group (Jonassen *et. al*, 1995). Learners engage in active, constructive, intentional, authentic and collaborative learning. Enabling the groups to socially construct knowledge through communicating and collaborating with others is an important element of constructivist-based online learning and teaching (Meyer, 2002).

Therefore, facilitating communication among participants in an online learning environment raises the importance of considering the capacity of the learning management to support interaction between and among learners and tutors to foster a collaborative approach to learning (Bürger *et al.*, 2003). In fact, the role

of the tutor changes from transferring knowledge to students to being a facilitator in the students' construction of their own knowledge (Fung, 2004).

Engaging students in online communication has been the focus of many studies in the recent decade (Swan, 2002; Prammanee, 2003; Bryun, 2004; Webb *et al.*, 2004; Hodgkinson and Mostert, 2005). Describing why this is so important, Harasim *et al.*, (1995:29) say: “Active participation strengthens learning. Putting ideas or information into written form requires intellectual effort and generally aids comprehension and retention”. Hiltz (1994) concurs and argues that although students may derive some benefit from simply reading materials online, engaging students in online communication can only provide its full potential benefits if students actively contribute to a group learning experience. She also warns that “active participation is an objective that may be difficult to elicit from all students.”

The question of how to effectively engage students in online activities is complex and as yet not well understood (Mason, 2002). Investigating online interactions in three undergraduate courses in a university in Seoul, South Korea, Jung *et al.* (2002:160) found evidence supporting the popular belief that ‘small-group activities are important in WBI [web-based instruction] to enhance learning motivation’. They found that the cohort involved in collaborative interaction ‘expressed the highest level of satisfaction with their learning process.’

The studies of Teles *et al.* (2001), Liu *et al.* (2003), Sims (2003) also found that facilitating communication is a crucial factor in enhancing computer-supported collaborative learning allows students to become active and reflective learners.

There are many studies in the literature highlighting the emerging importance of tutors in creating active and collaborative learning environments (Coppola *et al.*,

2002; Easton, 2003; Lim and Cheah, 2003; Sims, 2003; Pan and Sullivan, 2005). Laurillard (2002) says of computer-mediated communication CMC that ‘the pedagogical benefits of the medium rest entirely on how successfully it maintains a dialogue between tutor and students, or between students. This is determined to a great extent by the role the tutor plays’ (2002:148).

Indeed, this is the central point of Salmon’s (2002) book, *E-Moderating*. Laurillard (2002:151) summarizes,

‘With the appropriate planning and moderating, text-based computer conferencing offers an opportunity for articulation and for reflection on participants’ contributions, and helps to build a sense of a scholarly community. The success is totally dependent on a good moderator’

There are studies which emphasize the importance of student and tutor interaction in online learning (Swan, 2002; Prammanee, 2003; Bryun, 2004; Webb *et al.*, 2004; Hodgkinson and Mostert, 2005). Webb *et al.* (2004) argue that e-learning dialogues between students and teachers enhance student participation and learning. Fung (2004) advocates that tutors facilitate students’ construction of their own knowledge through interaction.

Although considerable research has been devoted to understanding the key roles of tutors in online learning (Teles *et al.*, 2001; Maor, 2003; Packham *et al.*, 2006), less attention has been paid to the role of tutors within online learning and teaching in facilitating communication for the enhancement of collaborative online learning.

Salmon (2002) has framed the roles for online tutors as understanding of the online process, technical skills, online communication and moderation skills, content expertise, confidence and motivation to teach online. Adopting these new roles is essential for delivering quality online education, facilitating

communication to overcome social barriers and enhancing processes to construct knowledge for students (Salmon, 2002).

This is, however, a field of research that has yet to produce further insights into the role of tutors in facilitating communication (between themselves and among students) to overcome social barriers in constructing knowledge. The question of social interaction is thus a significant one for distance education practitioners and needs to be explored further in discussions of how to enhance quality in online learning and teaching (Srikanthan *et al.*, 2004; Frahm, 2006).

In relation to the key themes discussed in the literature review and research questions, a bridge has been constructed between the theoretical framework and practical implementation of my research project. The practical implementation of my project is explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

However, in short, to examine to what extent the Distance Education Institute implements effective communication practices for change and development, I used focus groups as a data collection technique to create awareness on communication for change and development and learn the initial perceptions of tutors. In addition, there was a need to examine to what extent online tutors had an awareness of how their roles in the online learning-teaching process differed from the traditional context and to what extent online tutors performed facilitation roles within online learning and teaching processes.

In order to examine these questions, I conducted extensive interviews to gain in-depth insights from the experiences of the online tutors. There was a training process for the online tutors to help them develop awareness of contemporary tutoring roles in distance education practice.

Berge (1995), Maor (2003), Bryun (2004) provided a theoretical framework for the research with their emphasis on online communication, tutoring and social presence and their defining of the role of tutors through the simple metaphor of the four hats symbolising the pedagogical, social, managerial and technical roles of tutors.

Following this, questions of how tutors facilitate online socialization for active participation in constructing knowledge and what specific roles tutors play in facilitating communication in collaborating learning to overcome social barriers and thus contributing to construct the knowledge were explored.

In order to get answers to these questions, self-reports of the online tutors and students helped examine how online tutors perform their roles within online learning and teaching processes. I also kept a diary about the research process to verify the accuracy of findings. The credible research outcome resulted in the sharing of a handbook on communication practices and how to teach online courses in terms of online pedagogy with other institutions, and developing my professional experience.

# **CHAPTER III**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter covers the methodology employed for my project. It explains alternative research philosophies and presents supporting justifications drawn for the adoption of a qualitative research design and action research approach in my project.

The chapter discusses methodologies and epistemologies used by practitioner-researchers and differing approaches to research. It then explains the justification for choosing an action research approach and the significance of being a worker-researcher in the research process.

Furthermore, I give detailed reasons for my choice of data collection techniques and discuss ethical considerations. I further explain how data from multiple techniques were triangulated and analyzed. Finally, the chapter details my research process.

### **3.2 Methodologies and Epistemologies used by the Practitioner-Researcher**

Conducting research to establish is a feature of both the social sciences and the natural sciences. Research in the social sciences is of crucial importance to society. In fields such as education, anthropology, economics, the research builds knowledge of both human behaviour and progress.

It is useful to distinguish the features of social science and natural science. In the social sciences, researchers deal with events which are unique in time and individual development. Natural science deals with a limited number of variables

whereas social science concentrates on large numbers of variables simultaneously in order to explain phenomena.

In the social sciences, the researcher interests, background, ability, prejudices, and attitudes affect the research process, limiting wide generalizations. In the natural sciences, complex constructs are defined in operational terms whereas the social sciences have been limited by a lack of adequate definitions. In social sciences, educational research plays a great role in constructing knowledge for the welfare of society.

Educational research can be defined as a discipline that attempts to address questions or solve problems through the collection and analysis of primary data for the purpose of description, explanation, generalization and prediction. Educational research within the social sciences promotes theoretical understanding of educational processes and settings and serves educational judgments and decisions about policy and practice (Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Barak, 2002; Bryman, 2004).

In terms of my own research, a social sciences perspective was adopted. Educational research is a kind of social research, incorporating elements of social research such as values, theory, practical considerations, epistemology and ontology, all of which may influence the standpoint of the research.

#### *Research Standpoints: Positivist and Anti-Positivist*

Positivism and Anti-Positivism are two main research traditions representing different standpoints towards approaching the way to conceptualize research action. Positivism relies on working with observable social reality and the end product of research can be law-like generalizations. The researcher in this tradition has the role of an objective analyst, coolly making detached



interpretations about data that have been collected in an apparently value-free manner. On the other hand, anti-positivism relies on developing a deeper and detailed understanding of ambiguous and multi-dimensional concepts.

The positivist position relies on the deduction process in the research by testing theory, whereas the anti-positivist position relies on the inductive process by building theories (Saunders *et al.*, 2000). Deduction emphasizes scientific principles by moving from theory to data and the need to explain causal relationships between variables, and the collection of quantitative data.

Induction meanwhile emphasizes gaining understanding of the meanings humans attach to events and a close understanding of the research context by the collection of qualitative data.

In rejecting the viewpoint of the detached, objective observer, anti-positivists argue that individuals' behaviour can be understood by the researcher sharing their frame of reference, understanding individuals' interpretations of the world around them by dealing with the direct experience of people in specific contexts.

The following extract stresses the spirit of the anti-positivist position in contrast to that of the positivist position.

“The purpose of social science is to understand social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action which they take within that reality. Since the social sciences cannot penetrate to what lies behind social reality, they must work directly with man's definitions of reality and with the rules he devises for coping with it. The social forms which man has created around himself” (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:20).

In this respect, people are deliberate and creative in their actions, they act intentionally and make meanings in and through their activities and thus actively construct their social world. In the positivist position, situations are fixed and static rather than fluid and changing.

By contrast, the anti-positivist position takes the view that the social world should be studied in its natural state without intervention by the researcher and should have fidelity to the phenomena. The anti-positivist position is stressed as phenomenological viewpoint that underlines the investigation of phenomena.

Table I, following, outlines the spirits of these two main traditions.

**Table I. The Spirits of Two Main Traditions to Research**

Key Areas	Positivism	Anti-Positivism
Basic Beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Science is value-free</li> <li>-The observer is independent</li> <li>-The world is external and objective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Science is driven by human interest and motives</li> <li>-The researcher is part of what is observed</li> <li>-The world is socially constructed and subjective</li> </ul>
How researcher should conduct his or her research endeavour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Focus on facts</li> <li>-Look for causality</li> <li>-Formulate hypothesis and test it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Focus on meanings</li> <li>-Try to understand what is happening</li> <li>-Develop idea through induction from data</li> </ul>
Research Process	-Structured, formal and specific detailed plans	-Evolving and flexible
Involvement of the researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Researcher remains distanced from the material being researched</li> <li>-Short-term contact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The researcher gets involved with the phenomena being researched</li> <li>-Emphasis on trust and empathy and long-term contact</li> </ul>
Preferred Methods	-Operationalizing concepts so that they are measured	-Using multiple methods to establish different views of phenomena
Sampling	-Taking large samples	-Small samples investigated in depth
Data Collection Methods	-Experiments, survey, structured interviews	Observation, documentations, open-ended, semi-structured interview
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Provide wide coverage of the range of situations</li> <li>-Greater opportunity for researcher to retain control of research process</li> <li>-Clarity about what is to be investigated, data collection can be fast and economical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Ability to look at change processes over time</li> <li>-To understand people's meanings</li> <li>-To adjust to new issues and ideas as they emerge</li> <li>-To contribute to evolution of new theories\</li> <li>-To provide a way of gathering data which is natural</li> </ul>
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Methods can be inflexible</li> <li>-Not effective in understanding processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Data collections takes a great deal of time and resources</li> <li>-Harder for research to control research process</li> <li>-Reliability problem with findings</li> </ul>

Adapted from Cohen *et al.* (2000); Saunders *et al.* (2000); Denzin and Lincoln (2003); Bryman (2004).

Highlighting the significant elements in research practice in scientific and positivist methodologies, naturalistic and interpretative methodologies and methodologies from critical theory is essential to internalize epistemological and methodological aspects of viewing practitioner research.

Truth can be sought in three ways, considering epistemology, ontology and human nature and their relationship with the environment from which arise methodological considerations within the practice of research.

In educational research, epistemological and ontological considerations are at the heart of research approaches. These considerations create philosophical stances for research methodologies and design. An epistemological assumption concerns the issue of acceptable knowledge as a discipline. Positivism is one of the epistemological methods that is applied in natural sciences to the study of social reality. It captures the principles of phenomena confirmed by senses, testing hypotheses by generating (deductive) gathering of facts, by providing a basis for laws (inductive), and being value free.

The positivist paradigm that social scientists have adopted sees the external world as objective. In positivist paradigms, the researcher as observer is independent, focusing on facts and looking for causality and fundamental laws. Science is value-free and reduces phenomena to the simplest possible form. The most preferred method in positivism is operationalizing concepts that derive from measurements of large samples. Realism, which shares some features with positivism, applies the same kind of approach to the collection of the data and to explanation and a commitment to the view of external reality from an ontological perspective.

In the anti-positivist standpoint, the social world is considered as being personal and experience and meanings created by humans. Anti-positivism encapsulates the socially constructed world in a subjective way. The researcher as observer stands aside from what is observed and science is driven by human interest with a focus on meanings. Moreover, the researcher develops ideas through induction from data.

Interpretivism is a paradigm that encapsulates human nature and its relationship with the environment into a method for interpreting social reality. It incorporates the different intellectual traditions of hermeneutics and phenomenology, and symbolic interactions.

Objectivism as an ontological position concerns external facts that are beyond our reach or influence. Constructionism is an alternative ontological position that concerns social phenomena and meanings by social actors (Bryman, 2004).

There are three main different paradigms that provide an insight into social reality and its impact and provide a basis for considering methodological implications in practitioner research. In research, the normative, interpretive and critical theory paradigms are all used in the study of human nature and behaviour. In the normative paradigm, society and the social system is considered as a model for natural sciences and objectivity is discussed in terms conducting research from the 'outside'.

This paradigm relies on objectivity for explaining behaviour and seeking causes. The interpretive paradigm meanwhile involves the individual in small scale research by embracing subjectivity in order to understand actions and meanings rather than causes. This paradigm allows the personal involvement of the researcher and continuously stresses the importance of human action. Critical

theory takes a complementary position, examining societies, groups and the individual through small scale research involving the researcher as participant (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). As the critical theory paradigm concentrates on transforming actions and behaviour shaping within groups, it has an emancipatory interest whereas the normative paradigm relies on technical and interpretive action of a more practical nature.

Regarding the above discussion on epistemological, ontological and methodological assumptions about research and my own research project, the anti-positivist position sheds light on human experience and thoughts and led me to concentrate my research process within a frame of inductive reasoning. In addition, critical theory and the interpretive paradigm were invoked in my research design, approach and data collection techniques.

#### *Deductive and Inductive Approaches to Research*

In a discussion of the research process as “onion”, Saunders *et al.* (2000), contrast the deductive and inductive research processes. Table II outlines these distinctions, which were taken as a root for the philosophical, epistemological and methodological stances in my work based project.

**Table II. Deductive and Inductive Research Process**

<i>Deductive Research Process</i>	<i>Inductive Research Process</i>
Scientific principles	Understanding of meanings
Moving from theory to data	Building theory or model based on data
Causal relationship between variables	Interpreting socially constructed meanings
Collecting quantitative data based on statistical inference	Collecting qualitative data based on generating of meanings
Systematic and structured approach	High flexibility regarding human concerns
Independence of researcher to the subject that is under investigation	Close understanding of context and subjects
Necessity of selecting samples and generalise the conclusion	Less concern to generalise the conclusion

My research project involved generating meanings, collaboration of participants with myself and, hence, familiarity with the context and subject. The inductive

process throughout the research was intended to change policies in tutor roles' within online pedagogy to improve working practice in the Distance Education Institute.

Conducting research in educational practice with the purpose of getting people to learn for institutional development and knowledge means developing the professional practice of teachers as researchers as an instrumental activity in order to realize specific aims within educational institutions.

Since educational practices involve groups of people in the development of institutional knowledge and practice, it is important to understand the interpretations of these people, and thus lay down a phenomenological emphasis. Therefore, filtering experiences of people and embracing the importance of subjective interpretations in change oriented actions was at the heart of my work based project and in the inductive emphasis I took. Finally, in terms of methodological considerations, it is crucial to focus on the distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research design and be able to justify the choices made regarding research process, approaches and techniques in my project (Creswell, 1994).

### **3.3 Research Designs: Two Sides of the Coin**

#### **Quantitative Research Design**

Quantitative research design is divided into the traditional, the positivist, the experimental and the empiricist paradigms. It entails the collection of numerical data. It sees the relationship between theory and research deductively and takes a natural science approach with an objectivist conception of reality. It has a linear research process in which a hypothesis is tested by following basic steps, namely, theory, hypothesis, research design, devising measures of concepts, selecting

research sites, selecting research subjects, administering research instruments, processing data, analysing data, and writing up findings and conclusions in relation to the research focus.

Measurement is the basic concept in quantitative research and embraces the concepts of validity and reliability. Causality and generalization are the essence of the quantitative approach. The research approach deals with hard, fixed processes in an objective way. It is value free and conducts surveys to test hypotheses. It relies on abstract definition (Silverman, 2000).

The epistemological stance of quantitative research is that the researcher remains distant and independent of the subject being researched by controlling for bias with systematic sampling. The researchers' values are thus kept out in quantitative research as regards axiological issues and there is a focus on cause-effect relationships in its methodological stances. Theory is formed from an interrelated set of constructs formed into propositions by specifying the relationship among variables. The approach is to test or verify theory rather than developing it (Creswell, 1994). Quantitative research relies on measurement, using the methods of social survey, experiment, official statistics, structured observation and content analysis to create the framework of the research approach. Thus quantitative research has strengths such as relying on objective trends and being concerned with cause-effect relationships. It can be criticised for taking a quick fix approach to problems and not having contact with people or the field. It is based on statistical correlation and therefore the context that adds meaning to research findings is arbitrary defined.

Moreover, the meaning of statistical data can be interpreted without regard to common sense and there can be unperceived values. Statistical logic can also

cause failure to test hypotheses (Silverman, 2000). Quantitative research can be criticised in four aspects. These aspects are to distinguish people and social institutions from 'the world of nature', to have an artificial and spurious sense of precision and accuracy in measurement process, to hinder the connection between research and everyday life and to create a static view of social life. These criticisms open the way for finding common ground with the qualitative research approach and using a mixed approach in educational research (Bryman, 2004).

### Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative Research encapsulates a soft and flexible approach to meaning that relies on subjectivity. It stresses political aspects and uses case studies in a speculative way by grounding the expected research focus (Silverman, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Qualitative research focuses on the inductive process to generate hypotheses. It is about the whole picture rather than one piece of the picture. It is descriptive and process rather than outcome orientated. Qualitative research stresses the importance of the natural setting by taking meaning as essential (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Patton, 2002).

Although the qualitative research approach underlines aspects of individual experience, it can be criticised for being too subjective, on the issue of replication, generalization and lack of transparency of its features (Bryman, 2004).

In terms of epistemological assumptions, the researcher is close to the focus that needs to be undertaken. Taking axiological assumptions into consideration, qualitative research faces the challenge of being value laden and biased. In terms



of the language of the research, the researcher may use an informal, personal voice.

Significantly, the research process is inductive. The researcher uses categories and he/she is context bound. Instead of seeking accurate results through validity and reliability, the researcher looks for verification. In other words, the qualitative researcher needs to know about context, needs power to have access, and uses case studies, action research, ethnography, etc. as relevant research approaches. Observation, interviews, documents, focus groups, diaries are common data collection techniques that are triangulated for credible research.

Although qualitative research has the potential attributes to reach credible conclusions in line with proper approaches and data collection techniques, the role of the researcher can create the challenges of subjectivity and bias while collecting and analysing data.

#### *Mixed Approach*

A mixed approach combining qualitative and quantitative research could be an alternative that helps overcome the weaknesses of each family (Creswell, 1994). The contrasts between them help us understand the utility of the combination as well as their respective strengths and weaknesses. Bryman (2004) stresses some common contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research concentrates on numbers from the point of view of researcher while the qualitative research approach focuses on words from the point of view of participants. In quantitative research, the researcher is distant whereas in qualitative research, the researcher is proximate.

Theory is tested in quantitative research and emerges in qualitative research. In quantitative research, there is a static image of social reality and it is structured to

investigate concepts. Research findings can be generalized to the relevant population in quantitative research approach.

On the other hand, in qualitative research, the process is important to show how events are interconnected. It is unstructured and seeks an understanding of behaviour and beliefs in context. Quantitative research uses hard, reliable data rather than the rich, deep data that qualitative research approach uses. It covers large-scale social trends and connections with variables by analysing people's behaviours in artificial settings. Qualitative research is concerned with small-scale aspects of social reality and the meaning of action in natural settings.

Thus it can be seen that these research paradigms have different essences with their own philosophies. In other words, they have both strong and weak points that can be complemented in research practice in an eclectic way by using a mixed approach.

### **3.4 Justification of Chosen Research Design**

Research designs are different in their standpoints and approach to research. Quantitative research embraces the positivist tradition by focusing on the deductive process. It captures objectivity through research conducted from the outside. Qualitative research is vested in the anti-positivist tradition, focusing on an inductive process that emphasizes subjectivity and incorporates the personal involvement of the researcher. The two differ in their understanding of phenomena with qualitative research attempting to understand meanings rather than causes (Creswell, 1994).

Qualitative research genres have become increasingly important modes of inquiry for the social sciences and applied fields such as education, social work, community development and management, being pragmatic, interpretive and

grounded in the lived experiences of people. Therefore I chose a qualitative research design to encapsulate my research process inductively and view social phenomena holistically and in a multifaceted manner.

Table III outlines the characteristics of qualitative research and provides insight into the choice of research design for my project.

**Table III. Characteristics of Qualitative Research**

Characteristics of Qualitative Research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Take places in natural world</li> <li>-Uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic</li> <li>-Is emergent rather than tightly prefigured</li> <li>-Is fundamentally interpretive</li> </ul>
Characteristics of Qualitative Researcher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Views social phenomenon holistically</li> <li>-Systematically reflects on who she is in the inquiry</li> <li>-Is sensitive to her personal biography and how it shapes the study</li> <li>-Uses complex reasoning that is multifaceted and iterative</li> </ul>

Adapted from Marshall and Rossman (1999).

As qualitative research relies on subjectivity by focusing on inductive process to generate hypotheses and stresses the importance of natural settings in terms of meanings and the worlds of individuals, concentrating on practitioner research based on qualitative research with an inductive emphasis is crucial. Regarding the ontological influence on qualitative research, reality is subjective.

In my project, qualitative research design is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. As qualitative research design deploys a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, it is used in my project in order to reflect sensitivity to a multi-method approach and commitment to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience.

In this respect, I have tried to answer the question of “how social experience is created and given meaning in order to justify using a qualitative research design in my project. As a practitioner researcher, there is also a need to consider the

issue of ethics in terms of access to stakeholders, bias of data, and being too close to my context and research problem (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

### **3.5 Differing Approaches to Research**

In this section, I discuss ethnography, soft systems methodology, case studies and action research as research approaches that could be exploited in my work-based research project.

#### **Ethnography**

Ethnography is social research method that is a hybrid approach of sociology, anthropology and education used to collect data in people's daily lives for an extended period of time by listening, observing, interviewing a group or phenomena in a natural setting so as to reconstruct the logic in use (Silverman, 2000).

The theoretical perspective is based on changes in philosophical and sociological ideas such as symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and hermeneutics. The embedded epistemology is constructionist in character. It is a product - a specific type of account (observational) of cultural and social life in which the researcher is immersed in the social setting for an extended period of time with his main concern to explain and understand society and the human world and to reveal social and educational inequality for the purpose of emancipation (critical ethnology). The studies are flexible and varied: single site, multi-site, longitudinal, cumulative.

Fieldwork is paramount in ethnographic research design. It guides the researcher in choosing methods and shaping the use of methods chosen since it is a way of doing something with alternatives rather than sequenced steps. The basic anthropological concepts, the flexible and extensive use of research methods

(interviews, documents and artefacts) and analysis are the fundamental elements that shape ethnography by emphasizing a holistic perspective, contextualisation, and emic and etic perspectives.

The role of the researcher is defined according to the research questions and setting. The ethnographic approach elicits socio-cultural knowledge from participants, it studies and addresses regularities in social behaviour and social structure, in order to bring people and their environments alive.

Saunders *et al.* (2000) describe ethnography as a qualitative method for studying and learning about a person or group of people based on the premise that social reality can't be understood except through the rules which structure the relations between members of the group and which make it possible for each to interpret the actions of others. It studies the social world in its 'natural' state by providing insight and focus into marginal/ trivial aspects of life which may normally be overlooked by other approaches to research.

It provides an unstructured approach with flexibility of research methods, avoiding artificial methods such as experiments and survey interview. Reliability may be enhanced through varied use of methods – e.g. triangulation. As for validity – the use of 'one-voice, one-story' may enhance the validity and authenticity of findings.

Providing different kinds of data makes it possible for ethnography to project the phenomena from many different angles. That enables ethnography to provide a detailed description of society in which participant reactivity is minimal.

The sources of information may be unsolicited and spontaneous. This entails no relativism since the social worlds are real and objective, like the physical world, so they exist independently of the researcher. The limitations of the ethnographic

approach concern (1) issues of access, (2) the role of the researcher, (3) ethics, (4) the practical difficulties of conducting and managing data and (5) theoretical limitations of the approach.

### Soft Systems Methodology

Soft systems methodology aims to make changes in systematic, feasible and desirable actions. The main feature and the scope of this approach is that the researcher gain insight into real life situations from discussion of differences between ideal models of how things work. The starting point of the approach, similar to other approaches, is to define the problem or issue that needs to be investigated. Moreover, this approach has an emphasis on analysing the problem and possible solutions before any action is taken (Checkland, 1981).

### Case Study

Case study research focuses on ‘...attempting to document the story of a naturalistic-experiment-in-action, the routine moves educators and learners make in a clearly known and readily defined discursive, conceptual and professional space (the “case”), and the consequences of other people’s actions, foreseen and otherwise, for learning and for the ongoing conduct of the research project. Case studies focus on one particular instance of educational experience and attempt to gain theoretical and professional insights from a full documentation of that instance.’

Steps in case study research:

- Examine the political, historical, cultural and personal factors that shape the setting and the case
- Plan data collection and determine the level of analysis that will be attempted

- Collect and store data systematically
- Analyze data so as to (a) compare and contrast interpretations, develop unforeseen findings and interpretations, and explore anomalous or disconfirming findings
- Report in a way that has been reviewed by participants and is coherent to potential readers

The case study can be used:

- To explore a question, program, population, issue or concern in order to determine appropriate research questions
- To completely describe a phenomenon in its own context
- To conduct and disseminate research to impact on practice
- To refine theorization on practice

(Yin, 1994).

Regarding the above information on the case study approach, the practitioner researcher could attempt to use this approach if she/he is considering a single situation, and needs to gain a rich understanding of the context of the research. The researcher needs to consider “why, what and how” questions during the process to find out proper answers. The case study approach is a worthwhile way of exploring an existing theory in a single context.

Moreover, a well-constructed case study can examine the challenge of existing theory and provide a model as a new source of hypotheses. Using multiple case studies in the research increases the credibility and likelihood of worthwhile conclusions. Case studies may include questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documents as data collection techniques. A case study could be an

alternative research approach for my research project since I will be able to deal with a single case by being close to context, subject, and ethical considerations.

### Action Research

Cohen *et al.* (2000) explain action research through the combination of the terms “action” and “research”, highlighting the essential features of the method as trying out ideas in practice as a means of increasing knowledge about practices and contexts of practice.

According to Cohen *et al.* (2000), the approach has a three-step spiral process: (1) planning which involves reconnaissance, (2) taking actions and (3) fact-finding about the results of the action. It is a process through which practitioners study their own practice to solve their personal practical problems. It is a self-reflective inquiry by participants, undertaken in order to improve understanding of practice in context with a view to maximizing social justice. The main features of action research are listed below and characterise the qualitative research aspect, the inductive process and the involvement of the worker in the practice for change:

- self-reflective, self-critical and critical, based on understanding and/or improving curriculum, teaching, and learning. It leads to professional self-improvement.
- initiated, designed and conducted by practitioners.
- collaborative: it is considered as a ‘group activity’ not an individualistic activity, that’s why everyone’s view is taken as a contribution to understanding the situation.

Action research has two dimensions. There is emphasis on the researcher as a learner. Personal development comes through improving their understanding of



their practice (reflection). Then, there is an emphasis on the researcher as a collaborator, actively seeking the validation of their practice and knowledge (reflexivity).

Action research involves the following phases:

- selecting the focus of the inquiry and studying the available literature
- collecting the data from a variety of sources, using forms of ethnographic and case study techniques
- analyzing, documenting and reviewing the effects of teachers' and students' actions
- developing and implementing interpretive analytic categories
- organizing the data and its interpretation
- taking actions based on short and long-term plans, and repeating the cycle.

(Mills, 2003)

### **3.6 Chosen Research Approach in My Work Based Research Project**

Action research approach was chosen for my work based project as it allows me confront a setting in which a problem involving people, tasks and procedures cries out for solution, or where some change of feature results in a more desirable outcome (Altrichter *et al.*, 1993).

I chose action research as a tool, which can assist in self-evaluation for an individual or an institution (Johnson and Gill, 1997; Pring, 2000; Johnson, 2002; Mills, 2003). I thought that action research approach would create an environment for improving the rationality and justice of professional practices within a self-reflective, self-critical context dedicated to improving practice

(Lomax, 1996). In short, action research is a tool to use theory and practice for change and innovation (Cotton and Griffiths, 2007).

As action research is a professional development process aiming to change professional practices through collaborative activities, intervention, group support and collection assessment (Whitehead, 2005; Williams, 2007), a number of benefits for my project were expected. Action research:

- bridges the gap between research and practice; improves the match between practical theories and practices.
- recognizes the creative and critical capacities of each individual to create their own theories from within their personal and professional practices
- increases practitioners' feelings of self-worth and confidence
- increases awareness of classroom issues
- helps teachers become aware of their own perceptual biases
- questions practitioners' values and beliefs. The practitioner is ready to involve himself into a self-reflective process. Values are questioned, modified, clarified and sometimes changed as the research proceeds
- broadens practitioners' views on teaching, schooling and society
- is consistently the vehicle for personal, professional or organizational change

(Zajc and Bednarz, 2007).

In addition, carrying out participatory action research as a researcher with an insider perspective as part of the organization in which the research and change process were taking place, helped me develop awareness of the challenges within this process.

Saunders *et al.* (2000) suggest using action research if the project has implications and outcomes for the organization that practitioners are working in. Possible challenges include willingness to change of members and the nature of the research focus if it implies change and development.

Action research is thus different from other applied research, because of its explicit focus on action and the changes in organization for institutional development that it suggests. In this respect, I become aware of the problems and culture of the organization, and the need to facilitate communication and develop confidence in my expertise to create change and attain the best working practice. Cook (2004) describes action research as innovative, and as the reflective practice of collaboration for change. In this respect, it concerns the interpretation of collective activities for professional growth and change for better working practice (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2004; Halton, 2004). In my participatory process, I have been friend, counsellor, and reflective professional to propose change and development for my working practice (Hubbard and Power, 1993).

In order to inform action through research into practice, action research is a highly instrumental activity. In this respect, researchers as teachers have a significant role, gaining professional knowledge by thinking and reflecting in action and becoming a practitioner researcher by conducting action research to improve educational practice (Schön, 1991; Pring, 2000).

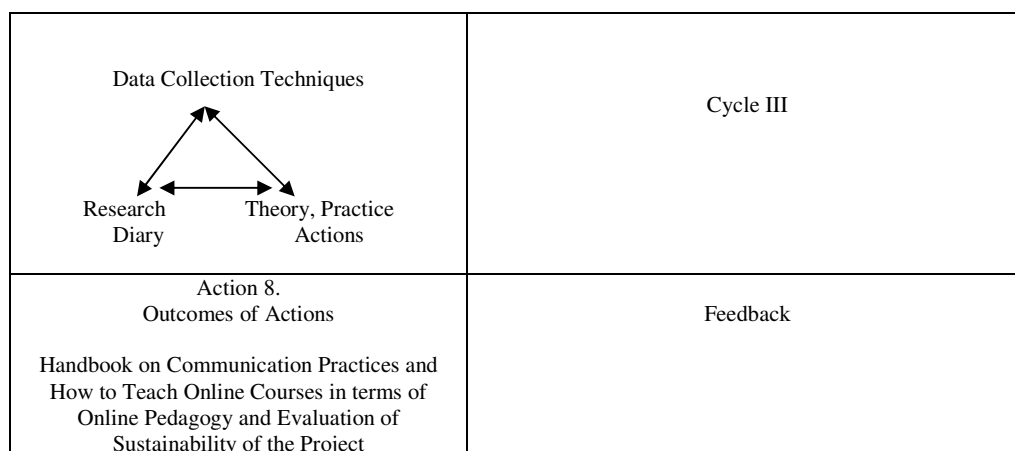
I have aimed to shape the thinking of the profession and institutional relations for both institutional development and professional knowledge. My position as action researcher and practitioner researcher can be demonstrated within the critical theory paradigm (Altrichter *et al.*, 1993; Cohen *et al.*, 2000).

The focus of my work based project and its actions concerned creating an action plan for the development of the Distance Education Institute based on EUA Standards. In this respect, it covered the roles of tutors to facilitate communication in constructing knowledge. It was a participatory action research process to identify and change the working practices.

Ledwith (2007) proposes emancipatory action research, as it is a participatory, critical reflective process for change. It is an experiential, practical process aiming to investigate and improve the work context (Altrichter *et al.*, 1993; Moore, 2004; Williams, 2007; Beatty *et al.*, 2008). My work based project actions and the action research approach stages are incorporated in Table IV below to show the justification of the chosen approach and the flow of my research process.

**Table IV. My Work-based Research Project Actions**

Step of Actions in Work based Project	Action Research Cycle Components of Action Research
Action 1. Institute Members Group interviewing (Focus Groups)	Cycle I
Action 2. Online Tutors 60 minutes in-depth interview	Cycle II
Action 3. Action Process Training Online Tutors	
Action 4. Online Tutors Focus Groups	Cycle III
Action 5. Research Diary	
Action 6. Online Tutors & Students Technique: Documents	
Action 7. Triangulation	



Adapted from Lomax (1996); Mills (2003); Middlesex University Module Guide Book (2008).

As action research approach is a socially responsive, popular method of professional development for teachers to improve the quality of teaching, and the learning process in a specific work context, it was an appropriate approach for my project, which aimed to create an innovative action plan for the development of the Distance Education Institute based on EUA Standards by focusing on communication practices and the roles of tutors in constructing knowledge.

It was the relevant approach to improve institute's and colleague's practices within a learning process which followed the sequence of finding a starting point, clarifying the situation, developing action strategies, and making teachers' knowledge public (Altrichter *et al.*, 1993).

The significance of distance education with the quality mission of EMU had become apparent in the EUA report. Therefore, revamping the distance education practices of the Distance Education Institute through online course development and considering its organizational structure became the rationale for my work based project.

As the nature of this inquiry relies on organizational change and new approaches to the pedagogical sides of online education on the part of online tutors and the

institution, the phenomenological stances of critical theory and interpretive paradigms became essential in my research process. Conducting research using training in order to transform new knowledge into pedagogical knowledge and to shape behaviours through collaboration became internalised in the research paradigm.

The critical theory paradigm also led me to internalize the notion of participatory action research to support institutional change and development based on my practice and the subjective meanings of people developed through experience. Interpretive theory enhanced my approach and helped reach my research outcomes.

Action research is thus a vehicle for personal, professional or organizational change and has two dimensions. One concerned me as a learner, as personal development comes through improving understanding of practice (reflection), and the other emphasised my role as a collaborator, actively seeking the validation of practice and knowledge (reflexivity) (Hubbard and Power, 1993; Mills, 2003).

The members of the Distance Education Institute, especially the online tutors who delivered online courses within the 2008-2009 Academic Year were a group of people that shared experiences in my work based project. My work attempted to understand the experiences of the participants and to gain entry into their conceptual world to understand how and what meanings they construct regarding the roles of online tutors in facilitating communication to enhance knowledge within collaborative online learning. This gives rise to multiple ways of interpreting experiences based on the qualitative research design in my work based project. Through action research, personal development then comes

through improving understanding of their practice (reflection) and through an emphasis on myself as a collaborator in ‘group activity’ (Cook, 2004; Halton, 2004; Zajc and Bednarz, 2007; Bustingorry, 2008).

### **3.7 Choice of My Data Collection Techniques**

I have tried to capture the rich complexity of social situations relying on anti-positivist arguments. This requires discovering “details of the situations to understand reality or perhaps a reality working behind them” (Saunders *et al.*, 2000). As qualitative research design focuses on interpretive, dense, rich data through human experiences within a pragmatic, constructive manner, employing multiple research techniques enables me to view the same phenomenon from different standpoints (Silverman, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

Action research provides my research project with an environment of collectivity in terms of change and actions. Therefore, I take an activist, critical and emancipatory stance to gain different views from different participants. (Altrichter *et al.*, 1993; Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Mills, 2003).

In this respect, having reliable and valid results in my research could be enhanced through multiple qualitative data collection techniques and triangulation based on inductive reasoning (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

The data collection techniques chosen for my work based project were focus groups, in-depth interview and documents. All of these techniques were considered to be relevant to gain dense information about each aspect of my research. Although using multiple data collection techniques provides rich and dense information about my research focus, each source of information from each action in my research provides the possibility of examining alternative

interpretations of phenomenon by incorporating different forms of evidence from different actions.

The questions and themes of each data collection technique have been reviewed and piloted by experts, thus enhancing the validity of my research findings. I discuss the justification of the chosen data collection techniques and the details about each technique in the following section.

### *Focus Groups*

Focus groups are the major data collection technique chosen for my research project. They are regarded as the most important form of interviewing in action research, providing collectivity, negotiation and collaboration between researcher and participants (Patton, 2002; Bryman, 2004). It is one type of group interview that can be practiced in a formal setting. I directed the process to raise, discuss and negotiate about problems. Questions were structured and the main purpose of using this technique was exploration and pre-testing in relation to the research focus.

Focus group is a collectivistic rather than individualistic data collection technique that focuses on multivocality of participants' attitudes and experiences. It allows the observation of collective human interaction and the gathering of a large amount of information about interactions in a limited period of time.

As the focus group approach involves collective interviewing, is not time consuming, and generates a large amount of data, my participatory action research was able to exploit the focus group as a highly relevant data collection technique, basically because of its collaborative research nature (Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). I used focus groups to explore awareness on the role of communication within the institute, to



train online tutors on changing roles in the online learning-teaching process, and to examine awareness of online tutors on their changing roles after training (See Appendix B, p.177).

### *In-depth Interviews*

Interviews are one of the most essential sources of evidence both in qualitative research and action research approach, generating knowledge from humans through conversations in which there is an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest. The interview emphasises the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production and the social situatedness of research data. Interviews may be face to face, one on one, by phone, or in groups. Interviews provide qualitative data that can be useful when informants cannot be directly observed, provide historical information, and allow the researcher “control” over the line of questioning through a flexible, adaptable mode of gaining information (Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Creswell (1994) points out that although interviews have potential advantages, they provide indirect information filtered through the views of interviewees, and in a designated “place” rather than the natural field setting. Also, the researchers’ presence may bias responses. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) underline that asking questions and getting answers from respondents can be a hard task.

Interviews can be semi-structured, or structured, and in-depth with the interviewer asking all respondents the same series of pre-planned questions with a limited set of response categories.

In my project, in-depth interviews were exploratory so that I could gain in-depth information to examine and raise awareness on the changing roles of online

tutors about online pedagogy prior to training. Open-ended questions were used (See Appendix D, p.180).

### Documents

Documents were used as a data collection technique in my project and I prepared self-reports for both online tutors and students in order to describe the changes in the roles of tutors in constructing student knowledge (See Appendix G, p.187).

Documents provide insights into the history and culture of organisations, much like an archive. Diaries and self-reports can be viewed as primary data within the category of the documents. I have attempted to use this technique to form categories in my data analysis. The review of literature and documents on organisational history may be used in both quantitative and qualitative research, and in qualitative research as primary data (Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Bryman, 2004). Regarding my research, the steps in my participatory action research, extended literature, and participants' self-reports provided in-depth data on their experiences, attitudes, thoughts during my research process.

### Research Diary

I kept a research diary as primary data in order to log experiences and reflection in the research process (Altrichter *et al.*, 1993). As it is an unobtrusive technique, rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting by developing the understanding of the setting or group studied through announcements, minutes of meeting and logs, it is an appropriate technique in terms of increasing the richness of action research data and constructing the whole picture of my institution (Hubbard and Power, 1993; Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

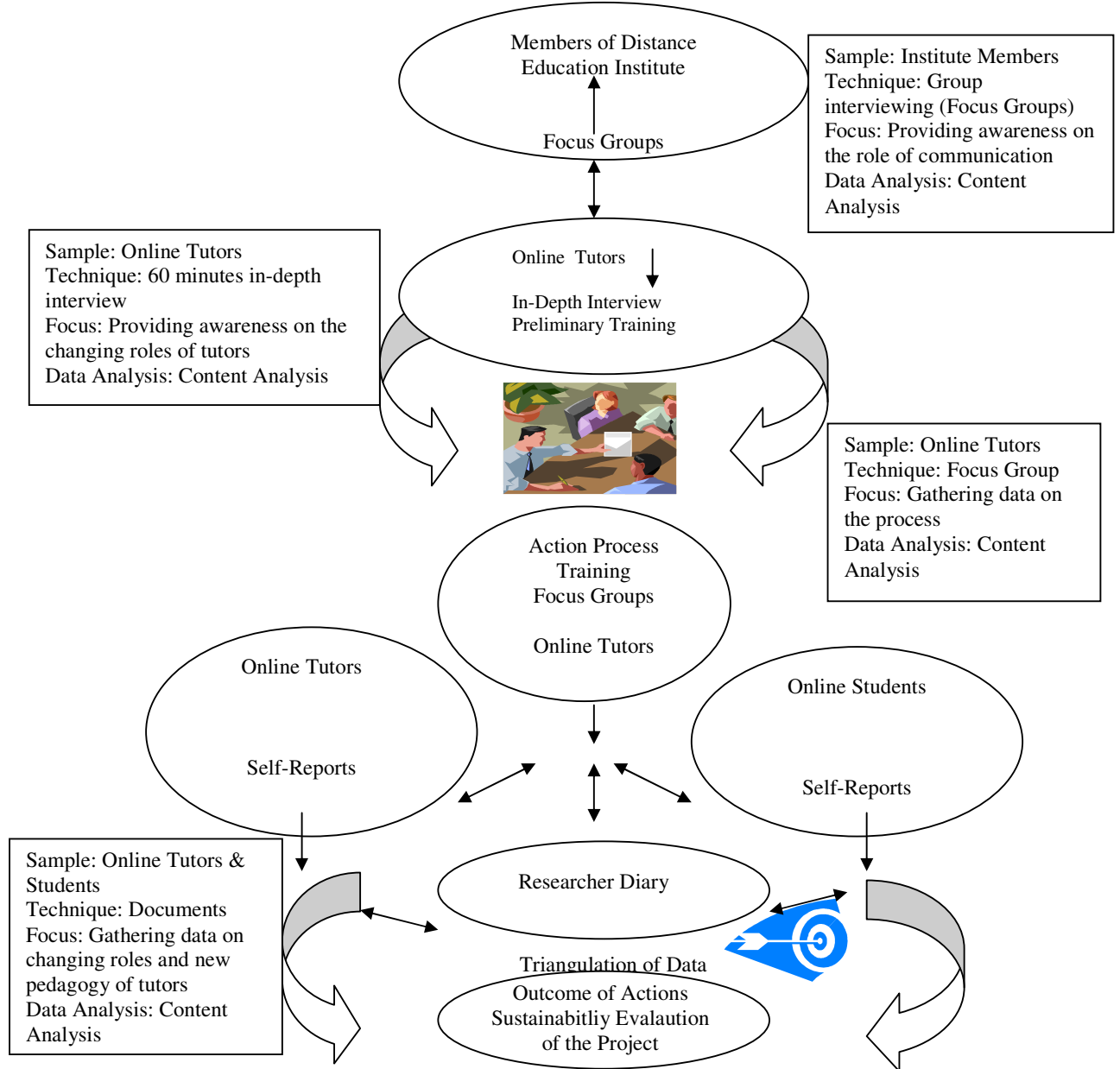
The diary technique is analyzed retrospectively. Diaries can include information of the detail of someone's behaviour, and are especially good at revealing the writer's perception of events and their feelings. I used it to collect information from a person whose role or behaviour was under scrutiny and to record progress, feelings, and insights about my research process. My diary became an input to my research data collected in order to triangulate alternative sources of evidences from other data collection techniques. I used the research diary to record critical incidents, as appropriate in the action research approach (Middlesex University Module Guide Book, 2008).

As Creswell (1994) states, observations enable researchers to gather live data from live situations and provide an opportunity to look at what is taking place first hand in an open-ended and inductive manner. Observations enable researchers to gather data on the physical setting, human setting, and interactional setting and programme setting through inductive reasoning. However, the specifics of my research setting and cultural context suggested it to be an inappropriate method. In the cultural context of my research, participants may become uncomfortable with the inspection and discussion of unusual aspects of collaboration and negotiation. The action research could hence have been restricted with this technique.

Figure 1, following, outlines the multiple data collection techniques in my project. It also outlines the data analysis and triangulation techniques intended to manage the qualitative data that were gathered.

## **Inductive Process: “Qualitative Research Design: Action Research Approach”**

### ***Triangulated Data by Using Multi Data Collection Techniques***



*Figure 1. Inductive Process: “Qualitative Research Design: Action Research Approach”*

### **3.8 The Sample Selection, Gaining and Maintaining Access**

Access was an essential part of my research process and I tried to secure access agreements prior to data collection. The first consideration in my research process was to set out how a sample could be selected and access gained. Therefore, key personnel and gatekeepers involved in my project were approached to provide access to the research (Eilertsen *et al.*, 2008).

As researcher as worker in the research context and familiar with the context, purposive sampling was used as an appropriate sampling strategy by considering internal members and the willingness of research participants (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000).

Research participants were thus purposively selected. Novice and experienced online tutors from different departments participated in my research project. Online tutors the from English Preparatory School, School of Tourism Hospitality, Architecture, Economics, and the General Education Departments contributed to the sampling.

I also gained access to the Director of the Distance Education Institute to ensure that my project was constructed according to the requirement of EMU's vision and mission for accomplishing EUA standards. As the project aimed to provide change and innovation in the development of institute, the Distance Education Institute was thought to be an appropriate case since its importance was stressed in the action plans of the university.

It is worthwhile noting that access does not entirely depend upon one person in an institution. Therefore, I as action researcher had to negotiate with other members of the institution, colleagues, online tutors as critical friends as well as the Director of the Distance Education Institute to engage in collective activity to

change the organizational and pedagogical structure of institutions. These parties, including the Ministry of Education, who provided funding for my project were approached and informed about my research project through a research package (Cook, 2004).

### **3.9 My Role as Worker Researcher in My Research Process**

Action research approach is seen as an ideal approach for improving organizational and professional practice through involvement. As the researcher is involved in the change, the research process becomes collaborative by its nature. Therefore, I as an insider, opened up a problem for the improvement of my colleagues and my organization (Lomax, 1996; Gill and Johnson, 1997; Mills, 2003).

The art of managing this started with an organizational learning system in order to accomplish workplace change. I constructed my professional knowledge and organizational knowledge through action research (Altrichter *et al.*, 1993), using my implicit understanding of my work setting and relating this understanding to theoretical. This mode of work enhances professional knowledge and reflects the synergy of practice and theory within the particular arena (Allwright, 2005).

“Educational practice” involves a transaction between a teacher and learner to make educational sense and construct knowledge with the purpose of getting people to learn what is thought by the educator and the educational system to be of value. It is important therefore to know how actors interpret educational practice within their context (Saito *et al.*, 2008). In this respect, the development and maintenance of knowledge through change oriented actions require institutional support and innovative efforts (Pring, 2000).

In respect to the above arguments, it is crucial to stress the context of construction of a theory through the action research process. Considering the roles of worker as researcher in educational practice is therefore essential, as is respect for educational practitioners as worker researchers and a clear understanding of the need to conduct action research in order to improve practice (Mills, 2003).

As my research aims to shed fresh light on an issue or problem, there is also an intensified need to consider my own role and position in providing contributions to my target audiences through the outcomes of my research. For shedding fresh light on the issues or collecting new information, I concentrated on the stages below:

- Recognition and definition of the problem
- Observations, collection and classification of data considered relevant to the problem
- Formulation of a tentative hypothesis concerning these observations on the phenomena
- Verification of hypothesis
- Formulation of conclusion (Verma and Mallick, 1999)

While concentrating on these stages, I become sensitive at each research step to ethical issues in order to get valid and reliable research outcomes. I mainly view social phenomena holistically by using complex reasoning and sensitive personal reflection in order to shape my research in terms of balancing involvement in the research (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

With the different responsibilities of being a worker researcher in the university in the discipline of educational technology and working as a senior tutor in the

Distance Education Institute and Department of Educational Sciences, I had the justification of being a motivated insider in order to make changes within my research context and thereby develop institutional practice. The environment of organizational change gave me responsibility for directing experiential learning and gave me a real sense of being a worker researcher.

As one of the researchers with in-depth knowledge and experience within the discipline of distance education at EMU, my project supported the improvement of the Distance Education Institute as required for the quality improvement of the university in relation to EUA Standards.

The work based project was managed with the collaboration of the Director of the Distance Education Institute. In the project, online tutors and members of Distance Education Institute gained knowledge and practical experiences about the pedagogical aspects of online learning and teaching for their professional development and organizational culture was constructed through this work for the Distance Education Institute. In other words, the project used reflective practice to enhance professional knowledge through thought and action within educational practice (Schön, 1991; Halton, 2004).

Through these efforts, the concepts of collegiality and collaboration were enhanced among online tutors, my work based project becoming a handbook providing insights on communication practices in the institute and giving details on how to teach online courses in terms of online pedagogy. This supported distance education practices at the university in terms of quality improvement as well as being beneficial to other institutions.

Armsby (2000) provided insights to me about the potential advantages and disadvantages of being a worker researcher. Regarding the positive sides, while



carrying out action research, the researcher can know more about the problem to be investigated and use the insider position to solve problems based on strategic actions.

In addition, a researcher can be allocated resources from the organization that an outsider researcher might face difficulty in accessing. Furthermore, a researcher has access to stakeholders who constitute the critical bridge between researcher and participants. Knowing organizational culture also enabled immediate decisions and actions during the research process.

Thus, being a worker researcher had a positive effect on professional growth and development of expertise. This influenced the work context and increased the quality and standards of practices in relation to communication practices within distance education. The potential advantages of being a worker researcher were thus:

- Internalizing the organizational culture and climate of Distance Education Institute implicitly
- Enhancing collegiality and collaboration between university staff for professional development
- Improving understanding in working practice
- Gaining in-depth knowledge in both educational research and my research interest within the practice

However, there are also potential disadvantages of being a worker as researcher: being too close to the problem, which affects the need to be objective and unbiased; and overestimating expectations and values. I managed these disadvantages as listed below by being strategic in my dual roles and actions, and by being sensitive to objectivity and ethics in my actions.

- Being too close to the issue
- Being influenced by my own expectations to reach the outcome of research
- Having different positions and responsibilities; duality of roles may cause huge workloads
- As the university is habituated to a centralized system, there may be a resistance to change among tutors to new approaches.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

Qualities that make a successful qualitative researcher include sensitivity to ethical issues. The researcher enters the lives of participants and shares their experiences. Therefore, stressing my role through technical and interpersonal considerations was important to enhance the degree of trust, and access in my research.

Having time to focus on issues and resources is not sufficient in qualitative research. The qualitative researcher needs to be an active, patient, thoughtful listener, and have empathic understanding and respect, as I did throughout my research process (Hubbard and Power, 1993; Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

Ethics is defined as:

“a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others. Ethics say that while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better” (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:56).

In this respect, ethics in my work based project was crucial in that there was an intensified need to concentrate on the conditions and guarantees proffered for school based research project. In this project, principles of anonymity, treating confidentiality, verifying statements in the research draft form and submitting the final copy of the report were important initial considerations before putting the

research into practice (Altrichter *et al.*, 1993). I guaranteed feedback in order to increase confidentiality and trust between the participants and myself (See Appendix A, p.175).

In my participatory action research process, I prepared a feasible action plan to act at the right time with the right focus. In this respect, Table V below outlines the ethical principles that I followed during my research process.

**Table V. Ethical Principles for Guidance of Action Researcher**

Ethical Principles		Actions in Research
Observing protocol	Taking care to ensure that relevant persons, committees, authorities have been consulted, informed and that necessary permission and approval have been outlined	Meeting with gate keepers, Director of Distance Education Institutes, Informing and invitations of online tutors to the research project
Negotiate with those affected	Work of researcher should take account of the responsibilities and wishes of others	Having contacts with online tutors, research package
Report Progress	Keeping the work visible and remain open to suggestions	Negotiating with colleagues and participants on research process and approach
Accept responsibility for maintaining confidentiality		Informed consent form and research package
Make your principles of procedure binding and known		Research Package

Adapted from Cohen *et al.* (2000)

I focused on the nature of the research, the requirements and implications of taking part and participants' rights, the use of the data collected and the way in which it would be reported. In this respect, preparing an informed consent form and a research package helped me gain valid and reliable findings for the project (Saunders *et al.*, 2000).

As satisfying ethical concerns enhances research, I concentrated on confidentiality, anonymity, access and negotiation before conducting research in and data collection (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). Gaining funds from the Ministry of Education and having an official letter to conduct research in the Distance Education Institute also helped show the relevance of my research to

the participants and helped build trust among participants, stakeholders and myself. As my project aimed to promote change, innovation and development for the institute, the possible benefits and applicability of the project were explained to all parties so that they could see the beneficial outcomes of the project. Before conducting research, an invitation letter was sent to participants explaining the significance of the project to their institutions.

The research package included information about researcher background, aim of the research project, research questions, data collection techniques and questions and the informed consent form (See Appendix A, p.175). These actions enriched the validity of my research findings by ensuring voluntary participation. Furthermore, I by following these ethical principles in the action research created the trust that minimized resistance to change and promoted a constructive attitude to each element of the research.

Within the inductive process encapsulating the experience and interpretations of all participants and stakeholders, a strategic approach was essential. Therefore, negotiation with the Distance Education Institute was key to the completion of the project.

### **3.11 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the systematic elicitation process of incorporating the mass of collected data. Undertaking data collection and analysis in a systematic and well-planned manner, it is possible to analyze data rigorously and to draw verifiable conclusions (Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

Altinay and Paraskevas (2008) define qualitative data analysis as:

“... the conceptual interpretation of the dataset as a whole, using specific analytic strategies to convert the raw data into logical description and explanation of the phenomenon” (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008:167).

As my research project was a qualitative inquiry based on inductive reasoning derived from meanings expressed through words and experiences, the collected data was interpreted through conceptualization and categorization (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

It was my view that action research improves the quality of human interaction, is participatory, and methodologically eclectic, seeking to understand the process of change within systems and using feedback from data in an ongoing cyclical process (Altrichter *et al.*, 1993; Cohen *et al.*, 2000). In my research project, action research was undertaken in order to create an action plan for the development of the Distance Education Institute based on EUA Standards by focusing on the roles of tutors to facilitate communication in constructing knowledge.

In respect to the nature of action research and the focus of my research project, different experiences and meaning were collected by multiple data collection techniques within an ongoing cyclical process (Hubbard and Power, 1993). As voluminous data can be gathered in qualitative inquiry, paying attention to how data were verified and building a coherent interpretation was essential throughout. Therefore collected data were managed through triangulation to underpin data organization, theme development and interpretation (Saunders *et al.*, 2000). I also balanced efficiency and design flexibility by focusing on a series of action and data collection techniques that would produce valid and reliable findings (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

### *Content Analysis*

Management and analysis of qualitative data from multiple data collection techniques were accomplished using content analysis. As content analysis is a

research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts in relation to the focus, I quantified and analyzed the presence of meanings and relationships of concepts and then made inferences. This provided a way of managing qualitative data that was less time consuming, and costly, compared to other data collection techniques by allowing me to conduct what can be called “desk research” without any disruptions, and produced data in a permanent form, ready and collected for analysis. Therefore, having easy access to research participants, being a worker researcher and having capabilities in the field, using content analysis in qualitative data analysis, and being strategic in action enabled me to handle my project, particularly in managing the data collection and analysis process.

I broke down manageable categories on a variety of themes indicated by the content analysis employed in my project (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000). Dimensions of organizational climate, the four hats” of metaphors of pedagogical, social, managerial and technical roles of tutors, the five stage model of Salmon, the roles of tutors within online socialization, and the quality and characteristics of online tutors were considered key themes in the data analysis.

Within an inductive approach to qualitative data analysis, coding, conceptualization and ordering were undertaken. I categorized the themes of each action in order to conceptualize and order the collected data. Conceptual analysis identifies in a text the existence and the frequency of concepts, whether in simple words or in phrases.

In this analysis, I chose a concept for examination and then looked at the documents available for analysis in order to identify the occurrence of terms

related to this concept in order to create a whole picture for the research findings (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008).

My qualitative research inquiry consisted of the following series of actions. The data collection process and analysis were conducted simultaneously. The first step was evaluating the organizational climate of the Distance Education Institute regarding communication flow. For this, I used focus groups. The focus groups enabled the sharing of experiences in a negotiated atmosphere among the institute's members. In addition, the focus groups supported the preliminary training of the members about the importance of communication. The targeted group were online tutors who delivered online courses from different departments.

Focus groups was the right choice of data collection technique as it allowed collective voices to reveal detailed evidence on social situations and meanings from participants' own experiences without consuming excessive time (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Furthermore, compared to individual interviews, focus groups provided the advantage of uncovering the interactive processes occurring among the participants. The data from the records were kept and analyzed using content analysis and converting qualitative data to quantitative based on my categories. In the qualitative data analysis from the focus group, content analysis was used in interpreting results. Thematic analysis was also employed in that a concept was chosen for examination, and the analysis then involved quantifying and tallying its presence in the focus group discussions.

In the second step of my research, I used in-depth interviews to gather data on how the current roles of the tutors and the new roles of the tutors differed from the traditional context. The target group for this were the online tutors.

Exploratory in-depth interviews consisting of open-ended questions gave a chance to the participants to explore their experiences, thoughts and recommendations regarding my process.

Similar to the focus groups, in-depth face to face conversations between me and the participants were analyzed by conceptual analysis. Qualitative data analysis is the conceptual interpretation of the dataset as a whole, using specific analytic strategies to convert the raw data into logical description and explanation of the phenomenon under study. In other words, data analysis is all about making sense of what the data say about the research focus. In this respect, conceptual analysis was the right choice for qualitative analysis to interpret the findings based on themes and categories.

Self-reports of the online tutors were used to report changes in the performances of online tutors in their roles in relation to their own point of view. As mentioned, the target group were online tutors who voluntarily and purposefully participated in my research project. The self-reports provided primary data for the qualitative research, providing in-depth, large amounts of data in which participants reported on their experiences, thoughts and perceptions in relation to the specific focus.

The self-reports were produced through questionnaires with open ended. Similar to the focus groups, the interview conversations and qualitative documents were analyzed through content analysis based on the selection of themes as in conceptual analysis.

Furthermore, self-reports were obtained from online students as qualitative data in order to evaluate the performances of online tutors in their roles and examine the outcomes of the action process (Hubbard, Power, 1993). Again, I analyzed

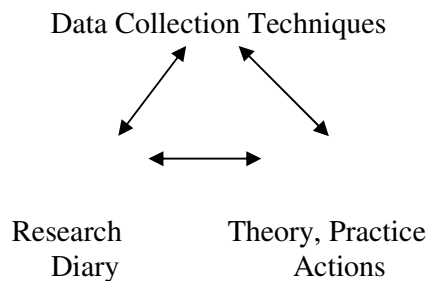


the self-reports of the online students using conceptual analysis. During my research process, I kept a diary and notes about my observations and reflections at every step of my actions as an insider researcher (Rowley, 2003).

### *Triangulation*

I analyzed the qualitative data in my project by reducing and rearranging the voluminous amount of data into a more manageable and comprehensible form based on certain patterns, categories, themes. Multiple data collection techniques enabled triangulation, which is a classic method of seeking convergence of results and compensating for the weaknesses of individual data collection techniques as well as better comprehending a phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 1994; Bryman, 2004).

The multiple data collection techniques and triangulation were shaped by the nature of my work-based project, and by its approach and focus. Data from the focus groups, in-depth interviews, self-reports and researcher diary were triangulated, increasing the validity and reliability of my research outcomes and results. Figure 2 below shows the approach to triangulation in my research project (Hubbard and Power, 1993; Creswell, 1994; Cohen *et al.*, 2000, Silverman, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Bryman, 2004).



*Figure 2. Triangulating Data.*

The final step was to prepare a handbook on communication practices in the institute, showing how to teach online courses in terms of online pedagogy and evaluating the sustainability of my research project through feedback from online tutors. This secured the outcome of my project by stressing the harmonic picture of triangulated data in my project.

### **3.12 Concluding Remarks**

In this chapter, I have explained and outlined research standpoints, design, approaches and techniques. Then, I detailed the justifications for the design, approach, and data collection techniques. For my research project, a qualitative research design and action research approach were undertaken and adopted according to my research focus.

Making the right choices on research approach, data collection techniques and research actions enabled me to take a structured and strategic position to my work. The research design facilitated the development of a rich understanding of the roles of online tutors in constructing knowledge. I collected data from online tutors and students in the Distance Education Institute through multiple data collection techniques. These techniques included focus groups, in-depth interviews, documents and research diary.

Inductive data analysis approach was primarily undertaken through content analysis. Procedures for gaining and maintaining access, and taking an ethical approach in my role as worker researcher were also emphasized in this chapter. Furthermore, I stressed the need for triangulation in reaching valid and reliable research findings. I will detail action research cycles, project activities and findings in the following chapters.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **PROJECT ACTIVITY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter of my project outlines the participatory action research process based on three cycles with their specific objectives. It begins by giving information about the aim of my project, its context and research approach involving three planned cycles of participatory action research. Further to this, it provides a detailed explanation of how my research process was set in action.

The chapter then details how the action research cycle was conducted. This part covers three cycles and the feedback within the action research cycle. The first cycle aimed to raise awareness of the role of communication and the second focused on the changing roles of tutors and training about how to teach online course in terms of online pedagogy. The third cycle aimed to evaluate the performances of online tutors on their roles. In this respect, the feedback process acted as an evaluation of the sustainability of my research project.

The chapter ends with a self-appraisal of the action research and my role as action researcher.

#### **4.2 My Work-based Research Project**

My project is part of a lifelong learning process in which learning and reflection lead to change and innovation regarding to the vision and missions of my work setting. As work based learning is a type of experiential learning, work based learning comes mostly through what people do at work. Therefore, focusing on individuals' work practices and on experience gained from their work roles, is key to the extension of professional knowledge. This particular project allowed me to reflect on concrete experiences, develop concepts, and be involved in

active experimentation. Work-based learning is about becoming a good practitioner and about choosing the best options for better working practice. It is about respecting humanity by supporting others to improve aspects of their own and colleagues' practices (Middlesex University Module Guide Handbook, 2008).

In this respect, my project involved an action plan for the improvement of the Distance Education Institute requiring changes to the quality mission of EMU according to EUA norms. My work based project was funded by the Ministry of Education as part of the innovative and strategic planning of the Distance Education Institute to reach the quality standards outlined by the EUA report about EMU.

My project aimed to explore the importance of communication processes within the work setting and to investigate the roles of tutors in facilitating communication in constructing knowledge during the online learning-teaching process.

I conducted my work-based research project at EMU. As the university is in part of the BOLOGNA process and is trying to reach EUA standards, distance education has become a priority for the development of the university. My work based project thus targeted online tutors to enhance online teaching.

The Online tutors were classified according to aims, experience and departments. Fourteen members including thirteen tutors and the director of Tourism participated in my work-based research project in order to develop their professional knowledge in online teaching. In addition, thirty five students became part of my research. Their self-reports helped in the understanding of the impact of my research project on the performances of online tutors.

As my project focused on the roles of online tutors in order to provide and enhance knowledge on how to teach online courses for the development of Distance Education Institute' practices, action research was employed to change professional practices through collaborative activities. The components of action research - planning, observing, acting and reflecting - guided my research.

My project's design and actions were structured within a cycle based on action research. In the first cycle, the role of communication in establishing organizational climate was considered. Therefore, data were collected and analyzed to make the base line measurements in my project. Then, evaluation of the awareness of the online tutors of their roles and enhancing their online pedagogical knowledge was attempted in the second cycle of my project. The third cycle examined the outcomes of the research project. Within the research, reflection was of great importance in feeding the project outcomes. Action planning was crucial to ensure well structured implementation. Further, positive action for change through training, and feedback was conducted based on the roots of the action research cycle. As a result of these actions, a handbook on how to teach online courses was produced as an outcome from my project. The function of the handbook is to guide online tutors on their online teaching process and make them aware on their roles in constructing knowledge.

#### **4.3 Getting Started**

My work based project became a reflective process in which I engaged with the work setting to critically understand the context and seek solutions to the problems that emerged. This was not easy to and it was important to be well planned and strategic at every step.

The project was a three cycle process requiring preparation of all details before implementation and a well-structured research process to succeed. Making contact with research participants, supervisors, consultants and colleagues, reviewing relevant literature, designing a research package and data collection techniques were all significant for the success of my research project.

Making contact with the Director of the Distance Education Institute as a gatekeeper and sending invitation letters through email to online tutors for participating in my research project were the initial steps to get started on the research. Further, I held phone conversations with online tutors in order to explain the aim of the research, their roles in this research and arranged face to face meetings.

I prepared research packages for online tutors to inform them about the aim of the research and the research activities. Two participant information sheets were signed by the online tutors in order to secure mutual agreements between researcher and participants. In addition to this, I arranged scheduled meetings with the online tutors in order to start off the research process.

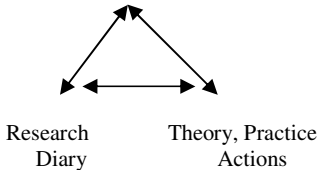
Thus, my research commenced with making contacts with the Director of the Distance Education Institute, supervisor, consultants and colleagues and making decisions about what data to collect, where to find it, and which questions to ask. Designing and sharing the research package with online tutors, making initial contacts with them, and arranging scheduled meetings significantly helped in building trust and confidence between the researcher and the key people in the research process. This ensured access and voluntary support to prevent possible dilemmas regarding resistance to change or even participation in the process.

#### **4.4 My Research Process**

As my research project aimed to investigate communication practices within the institute and the roles of tutors in facilitating communication in order to construct knowledge, the research was based on an action research approach process and the stages of my project were determined according to my project's focus (Lomax, 1996; Mills 2003; Middlesex University Module Guide Book, 2008).

The project activities and action research stages are incorporated in Table VI. Each activity is detailed in parallel with the action research process with the challenges and advantages of my project taken into consideration.

**Table VI. Flow of Research Process**

Step of Actions in Work based Project	Action Research Cycle Components of Action Research
Action 1. Institute Members Group interviewing (Focus Groups)	Cycle I
Action 2. Online Tutors 60 minutes in-depth interviews	Cycle II
Action 3. Action Process Training  Online Tutors	
Action 4. Online Tutors Focus Groups  Action 5. Research Diary	Cycle III
Action 6. Online Tutors & Students Technique: Documents	
Action 7. Triangulation  Data Collection Techniques  	

Action 8. Outcomes of Actions	Feedback
Handbook on communication practices and how to teach online courses in terms of online pedagogy Evaluation of Sustainability of the Project	

Adapted from Lomax (1996), (Mills 2003), Middlesex University Module Guide Book (2008).

Preparation of the data collection techniques and establishing contacts with key players in my research was the basis of the implementation of the research. My research process was viewed as a harmonious composition of all the research activities including the activities themselves, their preparation and their implementation within the three cycles described above.

The research process in my project encapsulated the basic components of action research, namely, planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Within the research process, three action cycles with six research activities were employed. Each activity was considered in parallel with the components of action research and the action research cycle. The research activities were designed and implemented for better working practice and for enhancing the professional development of online tutors in the field of online teaching and pedagogy.

### Cycle I

The aim of this cycle in my project was to stress the role of communication in establishing organizational climate and to provide significant insights to the members of the institute regarding organizational climate. Therefore, I conducted a focus group activity as a way of both gathering data and conducting training (See Appendix B, p.177). At the end of this cycle, I distributed a feedback form (See Appendix C, p.179) to online tutors in order to get their reflections on the contributions of focus group activity.



### *Focus Group Activity*

In my project, to develop awareness on the role of communication, the focus group technique was used to examine and develop understanding of the organizational climate of the institute on the part of online tutors. The interview questions were set considering the dimensions of organizational climate which are innovative practice, communication, institutional goals, supporting new ideas, confidence, dynamism and spontaneity in work relations, being open to research and finding new ways of carrying out tasks (See Appendix B, p.177).

In this respect, I prepared nine focus group questions in order to raise awareness on the role of communication among online tutors. The focus group questions were reviewed and piloted by two experts (See Appendix B, p.177). Further, I designed a feedback form, including two questions in order to evaluate the contributions of the focus group activity (See Appendix C, p.179).

I started the process with a focus group activity that was conducted with three different groups of online tutors. The aim was to raise awareness of the role of communication within the Distance Education Institute and among tutors. Before conducting the focus groups, scheduled meetings with four different groups of online tutors were arranged.

The three groups for the focus group activity consisted of five online tutors from the English Preparatory School, tutors from School of Tourism and Hospitality, and five experienced online tutors. The first focus group activity was conducted with five experienced online tutors in the meeting room of the School of Tourism Hospitality. Online tutors from Architecture, Tourism, Economics, and the General Education Departments participated in a round table discussion in order

to encourage participants to be confident in expressing their ideas. Drinks and biscuits were offered to the online tutors prior to this activity.

The warm-up was about the Distance Education Institute, the experiences of online tutors and my work-based project. As a researcher, I experienced a focus group as a first time and holding it with experienced academics made me nervous of the cultural factors that impeded communication in the focus group activity. Online tutors seemed embarrassed to discuss their ideas in front of other colleagues and participants didn't provide much detail in their responses. The activity did not succeed therefore in its aim of examining questions from as many angles as possible. To compensate, I conducted in-depth interviews with some of the online tutors in order to enhance the reflections gathered from the focus group activity.

Through this activity, I became a leader and moderator promoting negotiations and discussions among groups. My role in the focus group activity was to coordinate the process and discussion in relation to the focus group themes. I tried to be reflective while asking questions to the group and be an effective listener to interpret experiences and establish mutual understanding. With the permission of the participants, I recorded the negotiations and discussions. Although participants were initially put off by the recording, once the nature of the project was well understood by the volunteer participants, this challenge was overcome.

The focus groups demonstrated the importance of training for communication. As members discussed the communication within the institute, with my guidance they gained pedagogical and managerial insights into communication within the organisations and into the teaching-learning process.

Further to this, I gave feedback forms to online tutors in order to evaluate their reflections on the focus group activity and had them review and reflect on what they discussed with their colleagues in this activity (See Appendix C, p.179). While conducting the focus group activity, the online tutors stated that they were impressed with the research and felt valued to be in my project.

I held a second focus group activity with online tutors from the English Preparatory School. Finding a common time and clarifying their understanding of my project also proved challenging and there was a two week delay before the activity could be held. However the delay was advantageous in that it allowed me to persuade them to participate on a voluntary basis.

This second focus group experience was easier with the novice online teachers proving to be extremely interested in the project. At the end of the focus group activity, I distributed feedback forms to get their reflections on the focus group activity. The process succeeded in developing their knowledge of the role of communication, and the tutors were happy to come together to express their ideas.

The third focus group activity was conducted with tutors from the School of Tourism Hospitality who were planning to open an online masters degree programme. They participated in the focus group activity in order to gain insights into the process of research and learn about the significance of communication among tutors within the online teaching process. They voluntarily participated but felt embarrassed about stating their views, possibly from fear of exposing mistaken viewpoints.

After completing the focus group activity, I gave a feedback form to the online tutors. In this form, they reflected on what they gained from the focus group

activity and enhanced their knowledge on focus group activity by reviewing the discussions personally. They were very positive about this process.

In all the focus groups activities, the online tutors said they gave importance to communication although they were challenged when asked to define communication. They said that it was the first time they had been asked to define communication. Through this activity, both I and the participants gained experience of how to conduct focus groups and were able to share reflections on the role of communication.

### Cycle II

The aim of this cycle was to evaluate the awareness of the online tutors on their roles within the online teaching process and providing online pedagogical knowledge to online tutors. Therefore, I conducted in-depth interviews, training and orientation in order to evaluate and provide online pedagogical knowledge. At the end of this cycle, I provided a feedback form to online tutors in order to evaluate the contributions of the cycle and training.

### In-depth Interviews Activity

In this activity, I conducted in-depth interviews with twelve tutors. Five tutors from the English Preparatory School, four tutors from the School of Tourism Hospitality, one tutor from General Education, one tutor from Economics and one tutor from Architecture participated. The aim of this activity was to develop awareness of the changing roles of online tutors. This activity was part of the base line measurement intended to establish how my project was significant for both online tutors and institute. In this activity, the experiences of the online tutors regarding online pedagogy and teaching and their awareness of their roles was analyzed.

For the in-depth interviews, I designed questions to examine the awareness of online tutors about online pedagogy, of the difference between online and traditional teaching, the roles of tutors, and the construction of knowledge within the online learning process. Questions were prepared from an in-depth literature review (See Appendix D, p.180). While designing the questions, the questions were reviewed and piloted by two experts and corrected three times. The final version included ten in-depth interview questions (See Appendix D, p.180).

Before conducting this activity, I scheduled the meetings with the online tutors. Some of them preferred to hold the in-depth interviews in their offices and some of them preferred to visit my office. The first interviews were with two online tutors from the School of Tourism and took place in my office. These interviews took place in a warm atmosphere with the online tutors voluntarily visiting my office and sharing their experiences about the online teaching process.

The second interview was with an online tutor from Economics in the tutor's office. Although this tutor showed some resistance to participating in my activity, by the end of the interview, the online tutor was persuaded that there was an intensified need to learn more about online pedagogy and the roles of online tutors.

The third in-depth interviews were with five novice online tutors from the English Preparatory School in their offices. They were motivated to continue with the research activities that would follow. Further to this, I conducted in-depth interviews with two online tutors in the School of Tourism who had no experience of online teaching and little knowledge of the changing roles of online tutors. Therefore, they responded to only some of the questions in the in-depth interviews.

During all the interviews, I repeated some questions to make them clearer to my research participants. However, as stated, some questions were not answered in detail by research participants due to insufficient knowledge of online pedagogy and roles of online tutors. This made the duration of my in-depth interviews shorter. In this respect, within informal conversations, most of the online tutors said that they needed to acquire theoretical knowledge about online pedagogy and their roles within online teaching.

I believe that this activity became the heart of my research process and made online tutors evaluate their knowledge of their roles in online teaching and made them consider on the significance of gaining knowledge about online pedagogy. Through this activity, online tutors became clear about the significance of this project.

#### *Training Activity*

I conducted training after the in-depth interview activity had underlined the need for it. Training was delivered to four groups of online tutors in order to provide knowledge about the roles of online tutors, online pedagogy and how to teach online course (See Appendix E, p.181). Before conducting the training, I considered each detail in order to be both strategic and persuasive. In this respect, I prepared a folder for each participant including pen, feedback form and powerpoint presentation handouts about the training focus. I put these bags on the tables in the training rooms, aiming to stress the importance of the training and give value to the participants. This helped motivate the research participants and give them a feeling of responsibility for acquiring new knowledge from the training.

The first training session was with four experienced online tutors and was intended to enhance their knowledge about online pedagogy and their roles within the online teaching process. During this training, tutors took notes on importance issues and requested further input from the researcher about the project.

The second training session was with the five novice online tutors from the English Preparatory School. These tutors were excited by the process, listened carefully, and asked questions to improve in their roles both as tutors and research participants.

The next session was with the director and five online tutors from the School of Tourism Hospitality who were planning to open a masters degree programme and new online courses. They participated in order to gain insights into how to teach online courses. During the session, I explained the aim of my research project, and gave information about research into online pedagogy and the roles of online tutors. They listened seriously and took notes about what they needed to learn.

I also conducted training with one online tutor from the General Education Department, sharing experiences on the online teaching process and enhancing knowledge on how to teach online courses within the framework of online tutors' roles.

At the end of the each training session, I gave feedback forms to online tutors in order to gather information about the contributions of the training and to evaluate what knowledge had been gained from the training in terms of the professional development of online tutors (See Appendix F, p.186). The training sessions were an essential part of my research process, giving value to others and making

them part of an active research community. Creating good communication and encouraging self-disclosure among key players also enhanced access in my research. Further to this, I was able to provide new knowledge about the practice of online pedagogy to the tutors and illustrate the nature of action research in real terms. My training activity thus became a mirror of participatory action research process with the reflections of both online tutors and research participants playing a great role in the evaluation of the components of the action research cycle.

#### Action Process

My action process commenced after completing the three activities in my research process in cycle two that aimed to make online tutors put the knowledge gained from these three activities into practice in their online courses. The focus group and in-depth interview activities were the base line measurements to show how my project was significant to both online tutors' and institutional development. Through the focus groups, the online tutors became informed on the role of communication and learnt the significance of communication among their colleagues. This activity gave them the chance to gain from their colleagues' reflections on the institution and their experiences and knowledge about online teaching.

The in-depth interviews enabled online tutors to evaluate their knowledge about online pedagogy and provided knowledge to online tutors about their roles in online teaching process, thus establishing a rationale for the training. I conducted training with the online tutors to make them further informed of their roles and how to teach their online courses (See Appendix E, p.181).



After completing these activities, online tutors started to refine their knowledge of how to teach online course and put their roles into practice in their online courses within an action process. During this process, I continued my contacts with each online tutor as a guide, helping them with the online teaching process from the outset. I participated in the first class hour of their courses and observed how they orientated their students in terms of access, motivation and the online socialization process.

Further to this, I held meetings with the director of the institute and the technical assistant in order to provide more technical facilities to online tutors. I also held meetings with the consultants and supervisor in order to discuss the research activities and get guidance about the research process.

In addition to this, during the action process, I gave headphones with microphones to each research participant in order to motivate them further. This incentive pleased them and made them feel a valued part of a research community. They also felt responsible to conduct research activities voluntarily and spend time reflecting on their understanding and learning after the action process.

### *Cycle III*

The aim of this cycle in my project was to examine the outcomes of my research project. Therefore, I conducted a self report activity in order to analyze the performance of online tutors on their roles (See Appendix G, p.187). I kept a research diary in order to add value to my research project. At the end of this cycle, I distributed feedback forms to evaluate the sustainability of my research project and get feedback on the three implemented action cycles (See Appendix H, p.192).

### *Self-Report Activity*

After putting into practice the knowledge gained from the training activity, I received self-reports from seven online tutors who delivered online course during 2008-2009 Spring Semester and self-reports from thirty five students. The self-reports of online tutors and students were significant in evaluating the outcome of my research and showing the connections between activities in a coherent way (See Appendix G, p.187).

I gave my self-reports to the online tutors in a research package that aimed to evaluate the knowledge gained and practices in my participatory action research. This activity made online tutors analyze their performance within the online teaching process by giving concrete examples of their actions, and enabled them to review the research process by considering how my work-based project supported their work. The self-report activity enabled online tutors to enhance their reflection skills and report their experiences about their roles in online teaching, and the construction of knowledge about online pedagogy within the action process of the research. Conducting the self-report activity also provided the opportunity to analyze the contributions of my training as well as enhancing self-appraisal and interpersonal communication skills of research participants.

The online tutors responded by giving concrete examples of their online teaching practices. The online tutors also distributed self-reports to their students in order to make them evaluate the performance of their online tutors in terms of their roles and the online learning-teaching process. This activity made the students more aware of the online learning process and gave them insight into the roles of online tutors. The self-reports of online students also were significant in evaluating the outcomes of my research (See Appendix G, p.187). The self-report

process hence provided triangulation of the data by collecting the perspectives of both tutors and students, and illustrated how change occurred as a result of the action research process.

### *My Research Diary*

My research diary activity comprised my reflections on the research process. It included my experiences and the knowledge I gained from the research activities. This complementary activity provided further triangulation of gathered data through reflection on data collection techniques, theory, practice and actions. My research diary included both the preparation and implementation of research activities. It enhanced my sensitivity and enabled me to be a 'fly on the wall' in the qualitative research process. The diary made me consider and reflect before implementation and helped develop a strategic approach to the research. It recorded progress in the action research, as well as recording contacts with supervisors and consultants, and negotiations with colleagues. In the diary, I also started to write the introduction, literature review and methodology sections of my project. The diary thus helped with the rationale of the project as well as developing a road map for it, and was an integral part of the ongoing learning cycle and action research cycle.

In the second part of my diary, I paid particular attention to writing learning logs about data collection techniques with regard to deciding how to prepare questions and revise questions. While designing the data collection techniques, I considered the preparation of research packages and the research activities. I established contacts with research participants and prepared consent forms for the research package in order to properly instil ethics into my research

procedures (See Appendix A, p.175). This made for mutual understanding between me and my research participants.

In the third part of my diary, I took the process of reflection further, focusing on the details within my research process. I engaged in six research activities with each activity providing different experiences within the participatory action process. The first activity in my project was the focus group, conducted to stress the importance of communication to online tutors. This activity was a new experience for the online tutors.

The experience of this activity showed how cultural factors affected implementation, with online tutors finding it difficult to speak in front of their colleagues. The second activity was in-depth interviews. This activity enhanced my role as researcher and my communication skills and helped me gain confidence about my research focus since it transpired that the online tutors had little knowledge of their roles within the online teaching process. Hence, this activity provided evidence that my research process was significant and showed that I had an important role to play in training online tutors in how to teach online courses.

After that, I conducted training with the online tutors in order to provide new knowledge on online pedagogy to support their teaching practice (See Appendix E, p.181). This action process gave a chance to online tutors to develop their knowledge about online pedagogy and put that knowledge into practice within the online learning-teaching process, using me as a guide to support their practice.

As reflection requires observation, I became an observer of all the details in the research activities and tried to interpret all the steps in the activities according to the philosophy of worker researcher as insider researcher.

My research diary enabled me to interpret events and construct knowledge through experience. Being strategic and drawing a map for the research process became essential tools in structuring the research activities. Considering every detail of each research activity and reflecting these details in the research activities motivated me and the research participants to develop a healthy collaborative research community for the project.

#### *Finalizing Research Project*

At the conclusion of the research process, I received research packages from the research participants. I then analyzed the collected data and started work on both an article and a research handbook, which were to be the outcomes of my project. The role of the handbook is to guide online tutors on communication practices in the work context and to show how to teach online courses in terms of online pedagogy. The handbook will be shared with other higher education institutions to diffuse the knowledge and practice of online education. The themes cover critical success factors in online pedagogy such as the role of communication for organisational climate, online pedagogy, the online teaching process and online socialisation, and the roles of tutors in constructing knowledge, Salmon's Five Stage framework as a model for teaching learning online and the competencies of online tutors.

In order to realize the sustainability of the research project, I gave out feedback forms about the sustainability of my project (See Appendix H, p.192) to online tutors after one semester. This constituted part of the feedback process from the

three action cycles of my research project and made for trustworthy, ongoing communication with the online tutors by showing the significance of my project. Finally, I held a meeting with online tutors in order to give a certificate to them thanking them for their efforts in the research process.

#### **4.5 Self-Appraisal of Conducting Action Research**

Action research is an approach that relies on commitment, collaboration and action for change. In this respect, work based learning and work based projects can be enhanced and enriched by action research practices. In my project, action research was chosen to empower the professional development of online tutors and emphasise the role of communication in developing organizational climate.

As my project supported the strategic plan of the Distance Education Institute based on EUA standards, my research project became part of the action plan of the Institute. Therefore, my project aimed to create better working practice through action research. My experience of action research practice provided me with valuable lessons about the benefits of learning by doing.

During the research process, I engaged in a series of activities. Each activity provided memorable experiences in terms of both theoretical and practical knowledge. Being an action research leader was challenging and sometimes stressful. Creating mutual understanding was the key success factor and I therefore concentrated fully on creating a good flow of communication with the key players in the research.

During the research, I exploited various data collection techniques, all of which helped construct knowledge. For example, in the implementation of the focus group activity, managing cultural barriers enhanced my ability in crisis management, and in managing events and dialogues. I also used empathic

perceptions in order to understand others and interpret their worlds. These perceptions were used to implement the action research activities in a coherent way.

Action research helped me understand how to interpret “two plus two equals to five” and showed me that synergy in activities and between myself and participants played a great role in achieving the goals and objectives of the research. Experiencing the action research process reinforced my belief in the lifelong learning process and the importance of professional development in research.

Just as the action research process provided advantages to me, it also gave significant support to the research participants. The participants gained insights into how to teach online course through training and the other activities in which they learned how to negotiate and communicate with their colleagues and students. Their reflections enhanced their professional development.

As the researcher, I gained great insights into the roles of worker researcher and insider researcher through having the responsibility to develop better working practice. I became self-reflective, persuasive, a critical friend for colleagues, and a guide to students. Further to this, a professional study of this nature enabled me to both extend my own professional and organizational knowledge and help construct it for others. The abilities of setting priorities, reflection, managing time and networking were also developed by being an action researcher. The following pictures capture the strategic skills and project management awareness that I developed through this process:

# GAINING WHOLE PICTURE



Becoming Strategic



Management

Intellectual Flexibility



Networking



Communication



Reflection



Adaptation



Negotiation and Sharing





The high level of responsibility that my dual roles demanded helped internalize a multidimensional perspective and demonstrates my competence to carry out a DProf. Work based Project, which is in itself a significant indicator of success in the outcome.

In the following chapter, I present my research findings in more detail, incorporating the action research cycles and research questions.

## CHAPTER V

### PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the research findings are critically analyzed, interpreted and discussed within the framework of the action research cycle and research questions. The findings are incorporated within particular themes in relation to the literature, and the participatory action research cycle in order to capture key terms, experiences and perceptions within the reflective and inductive process.

In this project, the role of communication for developing the organizational climate within the Distance Education Institute, the awareness of online tutors of their roles within the online teaching process, pedagogical knowledge within the online teaching process and the performance of online tutors are considered. The key themes of dimensions of organizational climate, the Salmon Five Stage Model, the Four hats metaphors and quality and the competencies of online tutors provide insights into the research findings. (Salmon, 2002; Maor 2003; Robson and Tourish, 2005; Vries and Diana, 2005).

Data were collected through focus group, in-depth interviews, trainings, self-reports and my researcher diary, allowing for triangulation of data to provide reliability and validity in relation to the research objectives and questions.

In my project, I used content analysis to interpret and categorise the collected data according to inductive reasoning and key themes. Thematic analysis was used to stress significant research findings according to my research questions (Marra *et al.*, 2004; Altinay and Parakevas, 2008). I categorized the key themes as follows:

- Dimensions of organizational climate
- Five stages of Salmon model

- Four hats metaphors: Roles of tutors
- Quality and competencies of online tutors

In this chapter, I analyze and discussing the data that was gathered through the participatory action research process.

## **5.2 Presentation of Research Findings**

### *Role of Communication in Organizational Climate: Performance in My Work Context*

Cycle 1 in my project covered creating an awareness of the role of communication in developing organisational climate. Focus group activities were conducted in order to answer the research question about the performance of the Distance Education Institute with regards to communication flow within a healthy organizational climate. The research incorporated the collective voices of the online tutors and was hence collaborative in nature.

A healthy organizational climate is characterized by support, cohesion and intrinsic recognition. It supports innovation, open communication and freedom. Raising the the awareness of online tutors on the role of communication provided a kind of education to online tutors, and helped establish this positive organizational climate (Ng *et al.*, 2006; Ozcelik *et al.*, 2008).

Ismail (2005) describes organizational climate as a conglomerate of attitudes, feelings and behaviours which characterize life in organizations and exist independently of the perceptions and understandings of the members of the organizations. Therefore, I used the key themes of innovation practices, the role of communication, organizational communication, commitment to institutional goals, support for new ideas, work relations, collaboration in task execution and communication flow as categories with which to examine the performance of the Distance Education Institute. (Robson and Tourish, 2005; Vries and Diana, 2005; Chen and Huang, 2007; Chen *et al.*, 2006).

### *Innovation Practices*

Online tutors participated in the discussion about innovation in the Distance Education Institute within the focus group activity. The online tutors stressed that the Distance Education Institute has a good technological system and is innovative in terms of solving problems that arise as well as also providing opportunities for research projects.

One of the online tutors pointed out that Distance Education Institute is trying to benefit from external applications. Although online tutors are satisfied with the innovation record of the Distance Education Institute, some of the tutors suggested that the Distance Education Institute needed to improve in this regard. One of the online tutors stated: “this is strictly innovation eight years ago which unfortunately did not improve much”.

### *Definition of Communication and Organizational Communication*

Online tutors defined communication as understanding messages from people and getting the same message. Beyond this, they defined and discussed communication in many ways:

“communication means sender, receiver and message within process”

“informing what people are doing, getting information from others”

“interaction”

“opportunity to understand each other”

“learn and teach”

“establishing links”

“sharing knowledge”.

Online tutors stressed that organizational communication is like a machine with many tools. These tools are teachers, students, and administrators. They emphasized that

communication is a power like electricity within an organization. One of the online tutors stated that: “organizational communication means structured communication”. Another online tutor emphasized the importance of: “talking on aims, objectives of institutions”.

While tutors were discussing definitions of communication and organizational communication, they emphasized that there was weak communication between the Institute, students and their colleagues. One of the online tutors stated: “there is no organization at the moment, unfortunately instructors are trying to struggle away to establish communication with students”. Another online tutor stressed: “within our organizations it is very poor, it is limited, it is limited with colleagues. I believe our communication will be much better as we develop more programs, courses”.

#### *Commitment of Members to Institutional Goals and Supporting New Ideas*

Online tutors stated that they are very committed to their institutional goals. In addition, they stressed that they found opportunities to start new projects in line with the institution’s goals. On the other hand, two of the online tutors emphasized that they had no idea about the institutional goals. One of the online tutors stated: “I don’t know what they have been for two or three years, The communication channel is not working”.

Further to this, one of the online tutors stressed: “commitment at the beginning - there was a great commitment, but at the moment I don’t see it”. All of the online tutors strongly believe that new ideas are supported in the institute. Although they considered new ideas are supported, they stressed the limited budget in the institute to implement new ideas.

### *Work Relations and Searching, Sharing New Ways of Carrying out Tasks*

The online tutors responded to the discussion about confidence, dynamism, and spontaneity in the work relations in the institute by emphasizing that they are confident in their work setting. They thought that online education practices were a new and dynamic element in their work relations. Although they were largely satisfied in terms of confidence, dynamism, spontaneity in work relations, some of the online tutors considered that they were working alone in the institute.

One of the online tutors stressed: “we are members, but we are working alone here, I have no contact with institute members, I have no idea”. Another online tutor stated: “because the bureaucratic system is very slow, spontaneity we have but not continuity”. Online tutors were satisfied in terms of being open to searching for and sharing new ways of carrying out tasks. They gave the example of surveys being conducted to improve Institute.

### *Communication Flow and Role of Communication in Developing Organizational Climate*

Communication between members of the Distance Education Institute is largely through email. Online tutors stated that they have no regular meetings to share their experiences. However, they emphasised that communication is essential for developing the organizational climate within their institute.

They thought that communication is a core element in distance education practice and has to be improved through use of different technical tools, and sensitivity to culture and approach. They further stated that communication should be a mechanism to establish cooperation among members in order to provide a feeling of being part of the Institute.

In line with the findings from focus group activity, my experiences and observations recorded in the research diary confirmed that the online tutors enriched their understanding on the role of communication in the focus group activity. Although communication links between Institute, colleagues and students were weak, they had enthusiasm to establish a network among their colleagues to develop the practices of Distance Education Institute. However, base line measurement suggested that the Distance Education Institute had no organizational climate that recognized the importance of making collective efforts for the development of the institute.

Table VII summarises my evaluation of the Distance Education Institute according to dimensions of organizational climate as revealed in cycle 1 of my project.

**Table VII. Dimensions of Organizational Climate**

Dimensions of Organizational Climate	Comments
Innovation Practices of Distance Education Institute	Projects are examples of innovation practices in the institute.
Organizational Communication	There is no sense of organization due to lack of communication, lack of shared experiences.
Commitment of Institute Members to the Institutional Goals	Commitment of institute members to the institutional goals can be improved by research projects and regular meetings.
New Ideas Are Supported	New ideas are supported.
Confidence, Dynamism, and Spontaneity in Work Relations within the Institute	Work relations need to be improved within the institute.
Open to Search for and Share New Ways of Carrying out Tasks	The Distance Education Institute is open to providing opportunities to search for and share new ways of carrying out tasks.
Communication Flow with Members of Distance Education Institute	There is weak communication flow because of cultural and technological problems.

The findings from the focus group activity feedback forms confirmed that the focus groups provided awareness of the role of communication in developing organizational climate. Online tutors stated that they got an idea about both focus groups and

organizational climate. They emphasized that they found the chance to negotiate with others. Furthermore, they stressed that they learnt the importance of communication among colleagues, and the need to be participative in exchanging ideas. Further to this, one of the tutors stressed: “I noticed the importance of analyzing the problems”.

### *Awareness of Online Tutors on Their Roles within the Online Learning-Teaching Process*

Examining the awareness of online tutors about their roles and providing knowledge and experience based on the four hats metaphor were the objectives of cycle 2 in the action research process.

#### *Experiences of online tutors regarding their roles*

I examined to what extent online tutors had awareness on their roles in the online learning-teaching process through in-depth interviews. Research into the awareness of tutor on their roles within online education (Hiltz 1994; Berge, 1995; Harasim *et al.*, 1995; Berge and Collins, 2000; Elbaum *et al.*, 2002; Salmon, 2002; Easton, 2003; Gerrard, 2005) that Harasim *et al.* (1995) and Hiltz (1994) has examined the roles of tutors as planners, group structurers, facilitators and guides.

Smet *et al.* (2006) meanwhile focus on the roles of online tutors as motivators, informers and knowledge constructors. In my research project, the four hats metaphor, representing the pedagogical, technical, managerial and social dimensions of practice (Salmon (2002) and Maor (2003)) in the online teaching process was used as a framework for evaluating the awareness of tutors on their roles within my research context.

Both novice and experienced online tutors reported their experiences and perceptions about their roles within the online learning teaching process. They emphasised the



differences in approach from traditional teaching, whilst revealing a variety of different experiences and insights:

“It has been different experience, because it needs a different approach in preparation”.

“I had to find a way to attract students to the course to keep them following the course”.

“We tried to help students with the website”.

“Enables me to present course materials through internet”.

“Design materials”.

“I believe if they hadn’t been trained for this, I think most of the process would have been a disadvantage”.

Online tutors differentiated between online pedagogy and traditional pedagogy with an emphasis on the use of technology in the latter. One of the online tutors stressed: “it is totally different of course because when you’re in class, you are here with your body, with your vision, with your language, with your voice, but in online education you are here only with your writing”. Another tutor emphasized that the way of delivering the online course is different, stressing “definitely you would need training”.

The tutors noted that there is more human contact in traditional teaching. One of the online tutors stated: “online teaching is more flexible but has limited face to face contact”. Another underlined: “I mean in face to face teaching when you have a problem or if you encounter any problem you have a chance to overcome it”. These comments showed the lack of experience of the online tutors and revealed some prejudices about it deriving from the problems they experienced. The online tutors also had a variety of comments to make about the roles of tutors in online learning and teaching:

“Facilitator, you are guide to help them”.

“Checking students, assessments”.

“Putting sufficient materials”.

“Being researcher”.

“Establishing better communication”.

“Creating learning environment”.

“You have more responsibility, time consuming”.

“Checking computer”.

“Putting materials”.

“Designing materials”.

“Good collection of materials”

These reflections on their roles showed that they defined their roles dramatically differently from the literature in which my project was framed. In this respect, I can underline that novice tutors need further help to internalize roles of tutors in an online context.

The tutors emphasized that their students experienced social barriers in online learning teaching process because of having too many responsibilities, and time, language, and communication problems. The tutors underlined that their students constructed their knowledge in the online context through their course package, e-mailing, quizzes, exercise questions and from continuous feedback.

According to the perceptions and experiences of tutors as revealed in in-depth interviews about the roles of online tutors within online learning-teaching process, they were not fully aware of their roles and had insufficient knowledge on their roles within their online teaching process. They had little theoretical knowledge about the online teaching process and online socialization, and the in-depth interview questions provided significant evidence that training about their roles within online the learning-teaching process was essential for the online tutors. Table VIII, below, developed

from the observations about this subject in my research diary, shows my observations about the awareness of tutors on their roles within online learning teaching process.

**Table VIII. Tutor’s Role in Online Learning and Teaching Process**

Tutor’s Role	Comments
Pedagogical Role: this includes designing and delivering an appropriate educational experience, encouraging participation and fostering deep learning and reflection	Online tutors know only to put course materials on the website.
Social Role: this involves creating a learning community that supports and encourages students, monitoring progress and participation.	Online tutors have no knowledge of this role.
Managerial Role: this includes setting the agenda, objectives, procedures and rules of the educational activities.	Online tutors have knowledge about managerial roles based on traditional teaching approach.
Technical Role: this involves making participants comfortable with the technology and ultimately to make the technology transparent.	Online tutors need technical support.
Online tutors gained initial knowledge through in-depth interviews about their roles and they became encouraged and enthusiastic about learning new knowledge about online pedagogy through training.	

#### *Enhancing online pedagogical knowledge*

In establishing awareness of the roles of online tutors within the online learning-teaching process, I provided pedagogical knowledge about online teaching to online tutors, encapsulating information about the Salmon Five Stage Model, online socialization, and the roles of online tutors (facilitator, pedagogical, managerial, social, technical).

Through this training, online tutors gained in-depth knowledge on “online pedagogy, the online teaching process, online socialization, the roles of tutors in constructing knowledge, competencies of online tutors, and being a facilitator”.

I reflected in my researcher diary that online tutors had enthusiasm to learn new knowledge and practice new information for enriching their online courses. The feedback form from the training also underlined how training is significant for online tutors. The online tutors provided a number of reflections and evaluations of the contributions of the training:

“I understand clearly how online learning is becoming a key success factor”.

“It helped me to structure my idea and my course”.

“I got an idea about the role of online tutors and importance of online pedagogy”.

“Helps us to settle the roles of both tutors and learners and what to consider while developing or constructing knowledge”.

“I learned the roles of tutors which guided me in the application”.

“Raised my facilitator skills and enhanced my knowledge”.

Online tutors stated that the aim of training is to teach required knowledge and help acquire the required role and they considered that the aim of the training was clear. They emphasized that they gained new knowledge from the training. One of the online tutors stated: “I became aware of my responsibilities”. Others stressed that the training provided new knowledge of the skills required to be effective in a new teaching-learning environment:

“online tutoring is different to traditional mode, therefore, it helped me to see the differences”.

The tutors emphasized that the training supported their online teaching in many ways:

“it provided a basis to structure my course in light of shared information during training”.

“I will focus on skills to be a better facilitator”.

“It provides awareness on the new role of tutor, who needs to be a facilitator instead of a teacher”.

“Increase my communication and information exchange skills”.

Julien (2005) points out that developing new understanding and ways of looking in pedagogy requires training. In line with this, the online tutors underlined that the training provided insights helping them understand the value of professional

development in online teaching and stressed that the training was an opportunity for them to develop new skills.

### *Performance of Online Tutors in Their Roles in Constructing Knowledge*

Within my action research process, the tutors' roles were examined through the "four hats" metaphor representing pedagogical, social, managerial and technical aspects. In cycle 3, the identification of tutors' roles based on schema about the competencies of tutors in fostering online socialization and in constructing knowledge was also examined. The performance of tutors and students within the online learning process regarding to online socialization were examined through self-reports.

### *Five Stage Model of Salmon*

My project relied on the theoretical framework laid out in the Five Stage Model of Salmon. This model supports the development of pedagogical and practical knowledge about the online teaching process and tutors' roles within the online learning-teaching process (Salmon, 2004). The online tutors reported their practical experiences about Salmon's Five Stage Model of Salmon in their online teaching process, describing what stages they could perform in this model and how well they performed them. One of the online tutors stated that developing and acquiring the confidence to use technical skills can reflect constructive development of knowledge. Online tutors reported that they conducted the first stage of the Salmon Model successfully by providing site orientations, and using welcome messages for access and motivation. Further to this, online tutors provided online socialization through chats and discussion board activities, and used group work in order to create learning community dynamics. One of the online tutors reported that online socialization was developed by:

"I started a forum with very open hearted autobiography, this relaxes them and they shared their hobbies".

Online tutors implemented stage three, which is information exchange, by providing the topics of discussion questions and setting up group work based on collaboration, and research on their topics. Online tutors then gave projects, learning diaries, quizzes, group work, and collaboration based learning tasks in order to make students construct knowledge. In this respect, they performed fourth stage of the Salmon Model.

As discussion is at the core of the development stage of the Salmon Model, online tutors provided discussion based activities to their students in order to encourage them to transfer their skills to other areas of their work.

#### *“Four Hats” Metaphor*

Regarding online tutors’ reflections on their roles in their self-reports, they reported that they performed pedagogical, social, technical and managerial roles within the online teaching process (Maor, 2003). The tutors stated that they performed their pedagogical role by motivating students to participate, by fostering deep learning, and by facilitating discussion. Online tutors described their pedagogical role through concrete examples:

“Participation is encouraged through proper grading during the course and online interaction was a grade”.

“Motivate students for work and discussion, moderate discussion”.

“Learning during group work and responsibility helped deep learning a lot”.

“Reviewing my course notes, additional notes for students”.

“Chat sessions, discussion forum topics”.

“Asking guiding questions”.

Online tutors reported that technical problems limited their interactions with students and hence limited performance of the social role. Again, they described their performances in the social role with concrete examples:

“I am monitoring their tasks with specific comments”.

“Students were able to monitor their progress through quizzes”.

“E-mail address was given to students in order to increase networking”.

“A forum was designed where students were sharing information, passing questions”.

“The students did not have this approach and experience and it was difficult to foster it”.

The online tutors also reported on performance of their managerial roles with concrete examples:

“I clearly explained logic behind the course and my teaching philosophy”.

“I list my expectations and communication channels”.

“I have done a major part of my teaching plan before course delivery”.

“My course plan is evidence”.

“Announcements”.

“Implications of the course could be explained”.

The tutors also reported on their performance of their technical roles with concrete examples, some of which exposed the limitations of the system:

“Distance Education Institute supports this role”.

“I required very much technical support, and had a helpful research assistant”.

“This was the weakness of the system, lack of adequate technical support”.

“The choice of technology needs to be chosen carefully as not to hinder the learning process. A list of minimum requirements must be given to learners and tutors in order to stop technological problems”.

Regarding the four hats metaphor, the online tutors put these roles into practice, albeit with some technical problems. These technical problems limited the online socialization of the students and the performance of the tutors in their social role.

Regarding the reflections of online students in relation to the roles of tutors, the online students reported that their online tutors performed pedagogical, social, technical and managerial roles within their online learning process. Online students stressed that their online tutors performed their pedagogical roles by providing deep learning, discussing interesting topics, and sharing experiences. Online students reported their online tutors' performances in the pedagogical role with concrete examples:

“Showing how to use information”.

“How to organize our works”.

“Doing without stress”.

“Enjoyable-discussing method”.

“Reflection”.

“Arrangements by friendly atmosphere”.

Further to this, online students reported the social roles of their online tutors:

“Sharing ideas”.

“Having group, meeting new person, it is very good for social improvement”.

“Giving ideas by motivating and encouraging”.

“Holding discussions and working together as a team”.

“This is gift to us, teacher and student relationship in high level which this give self confidence”.

“Having more curiosity to learn new subjects”.

On the other hand, online students reported that their tutors performed their managerial roles by setting rules, objectives and procedures for educational activities. In addition, online students reported that their online tutors performed their technical roles by helping them to develop their technical skills through internet searching. Regarding the



reflections of online students on the four hats metaphor, their view was that the online tutors successfully performed these roles.

### *Roles of Tutors within Online Socialization*

Online tutors and students reported on the roles of tutors in online learning and teaching through self-reports. Discussing their role in the online socialization of students for constructing knowledge, the tutors stressed that they facilitated learning of their students through communicative environments (Packham *et al.*, 2006):

“In order to encourage maximum numbers of students to share allocated times, in their forum, they can raise their questions, inquiries, and share all information, so knowledge is constructed through chats and forms”.

“I was a facilitator in respects to the fact that learners were placed in group discussions”.

“I suggested a topic for group discussion and everyone in the group was able to participate and contribute”.

“Encourage groups to form and develop its own life history”.

“I became a starter of forums and I made grouping roles”

In relation to the reflections of online tutors, it can be seen that online tutors made efforts to adopt pedagogical knowledge about online teaching in order to facilitate online socialization and help online students to construct knowledge within their online learning process.

The students reported on the roles of online tutors within the online socialization process, emphasizing that their online tutors facilitated their learning through learning diaries, reflection, discussions and group works:

“Knowledge and experiences to share”.

“Searching”.

“Pedagogical and managerial roles enhanced the social role of my tutor”.

In relation to the reflections of online students, it is confirmed that online tutors adopted pedagogical knowledge to online teaching in order to facilitate online socialization in constructing knowledge of online students within their online learning process.

### *Quality and Characteristics of Online Tutors*

I identified tutors' roles based on six qualities and five levels of characteristics (Salmon, 2004). Regarding these qualities and characteristics, the online tutors indicated their roles and abilities while teaching their online courses. They identified the constructive characteristic through being able to appreciate the basic structure of online conferencing, and having the technical skills to use the internet for potential learning. They identified the knowledge sharing quality in the exploration of ideas, development of arguments and promotion of valuable threads. The facilitating quality emerged through interactions through e-mail and the modelling process that gradually increased the quantity of participation and developed communication skills.

One of the online tutors discussed the development of confidence in content expertise through reference to the willingness to add personal contributions to the teaching of online courses. Another referred to the developmental quality in terms of having the ability to develop and enable others, act as a catalyst, foster discussion, summarize, restate challenges, monitor understandings and misunderstandings and take on board feedback. One of the online tutors indicated that s/he was creative, and a number of the online tutors reported they were able to use a range of approaches from structured to less structured activities once they understood the online process. In addition, online tutors reported that they had acquired the developmental quality by being able to adapt to new teaching contexts, methods, audiences and roles with the personal characteristic.

Online students also evaluated the six qualities and five levels of characteristics of online tutors, stressing that their online tutors had the qualities of confidence, facilitating, knowledge sharing, being constructive, developmental and creative.

Online students noted that their tutors had the constructive quality in that they understood the basic structure of online conferencing and the potential of the internet for learning. They identified that their online tutors had the knowledge sharing quality by noting the exploration of ideas, the development of arguments and the promotion of valuable threads. The facilitating quality was identified through the use of e-mail interaction, modelling and increased participation. The online students indicated the confidence of their tutors with respect to content expertise through their willingness to add own their contributions while teaching online courses.

Online students noted that their tutors had the developmental quality through their ability to develop and enable others, acts as catalysts, foster discussion, summarize, restate challenges, monitor understandings and misunderstandings and take feedback. They also stressed that their online tutors had technical and communication skills and understood the online process. The online students' reflections on the performances of their online tutors is summarised in Table IX below:

**Table IX. Tutors' Roles based on Online Students' Perceptions**

Tutor's Role	Online Students' Comments
Pedagogical Role: this includes designing and delivering an appropriate educational experience, encouraging participation and fostering deep learning and reflection	Group discussion, work, learning diaries, sharing autobiographies, research.
Social Role: this involves creating a learning community that supports and encourages students, monitoring progress and participation.	Group work, discussions.
Managerial Role: this includes setting the agenda, objectives, procedures and rules of the educational activities.	Course notes and materials on the website.
Technical Role: this involves making participants comfortable with the technology and ultimately to make the technology transparent.	Technical skills are improved through searching.
Overall comment: Online students emphasized that their online tutors provided an environment of constructing knowledge through the online socialization process. They reported that deep learning is facilitated through online learning.	

My research diary, based on my observations and interpretations about the self-reports of both tutors and students confirmed that the online tutors were enthusiastic about practicing the Four Hats Metaphor and the Salmon Five Stage Model. The self-reports provided extensive reflections on the outcome of the project on the part of both students and tutors. Further, the self-reports provided a basis for evaluating the performance of the tutors in their roles and in the ways they facilitated online socialization for constructing knowledge.

The findings from the self-reports confirmed that the online tutors performed their pedagogical, social, technical and managerial roles by implementing the Five Stage Model and that they had the qualities of being confident, constructive, developmental, facilitating, knowledge sharing and creative. These qualities were developed from the characteristics of understanding the online process, technical skills, online communication skills, content expertise and personal characteristics, and enabled the tutors to perform their roles in facilitating the construction of knowledge in their online students.

#### *Evaluating Sustainability of My Work-based Research Project*

##### *Reflections on the Outcomes of My Work-based Research Project*

In evaluating the sustainability of my project and the success of the action research based on the three main cycles, the feedback forms of the online tutors provided insights into the outcomes and sustainability of my project:

“This study is a perfect synopsis of how an online tutor and course should be”.

“I realized that I need something to learn more”.

“Synergy was enhanced among tutors”.

“This exercise helped me to learn more about barriers and constructed better knowledge”.

“This project helped us see the importance of roles of tutors”.

“I am happy to be involved in this project as it has helped me to better understand my role”.

#### *Contributions of My Project Activities to Online Pedagogy and Roles of Tutors*

Online tutors reported on their reflections and evaluations about the contributions of my project activities on online pedagogy and the roles of tutors in facilitating learning in many ways:

“Project activities were quite helpful. It gave us the opportunities to communicate and share experiences, listen to others with online tutoring experience and to become aware of some important issues in online pedagogy field”.

“Once our role as a tutor was redefined as a facilitator”.

“This process has helped me to break the monotonous class atmosphere and teaching approaches”.

“Importance of communication and interaction has been stressed”.

According to the perceptions and experiences of online tutors about the incorporation of Salmon’s Five Stage Model in their online teaching process, online tutors stated that this model helped guide them on how to teach their online courses. Online tutors reported that the model provided a new mechanism for establishing information exchange and knowledge construction. Online tutors’ reflections about the contributions of this model of teaching and learning included:

“The model has helped to prepare an atmosphere for motivation and online socialization”.

“I practiced access and motivation, online socialization stages”.

Online tutors reported their reflections about the contributions of the model with concrete examples:

“Stage 1: The system was set already set up: but it is updated every semester and this needs some time and cooperation with the institute assistant. Students are welcomed and encouraged by the tutor during a class-room meeting, where they are also provided their password and

instructed how to use the web site. Stage 2: Students send messages only when their password is not working or their quiz is not submitted. Stage 3: Students are expected to make further research. But the majority of the students have language problems. For this reason students could not be expected to do further reading while they could hardly cope with the lecture notes on the web. As a lecturer, I try to encourage them to join discussions during on-line contact hours. Also students are recommended to read the lecture notes as well as view the slide shows. Stage 4: Students are encouraged towards critical thinking through the quiz questions. Stage 5: The students are expected to become critical in the medium. But they just focus on doing the quiz rather than realizing our expectation that first they should learn and that the quiz is a way of revising what they learnt”.

“I incorporated the model as follows:

There’s always a welcome note for everyone and students are oriented on how to login to their courses. Students are placed in pairs or groups as this is a language class to participate in discussions. This enables each student to participate and thus minimizes the number of lurkers. Stage 4 and 5: in the virtual language classroom, the students are always provided with specific roles thus enabling participation. Learners are encouraged to use the social spaces provided as and when they feel necessary”.

In summary, the action research cycle revealed the “roles of tutors” as identified by Berge (1995), Salmon (2002), Maor (2003) and showed the impact of pedagogical knowledge on online tutors and the enhancement of online teaching skills that followed.

The implications for professional practice are therefore to emphasise the development of professional knowledge in online pedagogy. It was through this development that the online tutors became aware of the role of communication and their roles within online teaching process. The success of my project in this regard is illustrated by triangulated data and the enthusiasm of the online tutors within the action learning process to improve both professional knowledge and experience.

The next chapter draws conclusions from the actions and findings, explores major implications and makes recommendations for further studies.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter includes a general evaluation of my project, conclusions, major implications and recommendations. It describes reflections and outcomes as related to the research aim and objectives, and contextualises the work within the related literature on the subject. Furthermore, the chapter explores major implications regarding change and development in online practices. The chapter ends with recommendations for further research.

#### **6.2 General Evaluation of My Work based Research Project**

My project aimed to investigate the role of communication within the framework of the organizational climate at the Distance Education Institute. Further to this, it aimed to examine the roles of tutors in facilitating communication to construct knowledge within the online learning and teaching process at EMU.

My research regarding the research focus proposed collaborative, change oriented actions for the development of my working practice in the Distance Education Institute. In this respect, participatory action research was employed for the research project. This confirmed the need for change and development in online pedagogy for better working practice.

My research project mainly covered an investigation of the impact of communication practices as a critical element in developing organisational climate for organizational change and development. In respect to this broader aim of my project, I tried to contribute to quality improvements at EMU through the improvement of the Distance

Education Institute as an innovative and strategic unit in the quest for quality, global standards.

In this pursuit, I examined the current roles of online tutors and encouraged changes in those roles through participatory action research. Additionally, the impact of social presence and the facilitating role of tutors in the construction of knowledge were explored within my research project. Thereby, my project aimed to develop working practice and contribute to an academic agenda in which action plans and work based projects help higher education institutions improve their performance level.

In this respect, my project achieved success by creating awareness of the relevance of communication and organizational climate in the Distance Education Institute, gaining insights into the roles of tutors in the online learning and teaching process, enhancing the online socialization of students by overcoming social barriers, and creating an organizational culture in the Distance Education Institute by focusing on communication practices between tutors and among students.

Higher education institutions have started to work on quality improvements by considering service differentiation to gain competitive advantage within a competitive environment. In this respect, online education practices and distance education institutes have become an innovative way of expanding service capacity and reaching out to multicultural and external environments to increase the reputation of the institution. Therefore, proposing change oriented actions for both pedagogical and organisational aspects of online education practice has become inevitable in the pursuit of better working practice and quality practice (Sahney *et al.*, 2004; McPherson and Nunes, 2006). My research project provided practical implementations for change and development within the Distance Education Institute regarding online pedagogy for better working practice.



Developing a culture within a work context is strongly based on the communication, knowledge sharing and interaction of the members. In this respect, I believe that it is important to focus on communication and interaction within the work environment to develop better working practice and contribute to professional learning.

Constructive communication flow in organisations positively influences knowledge sharing and better work performance (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2004). In this regard, my research project covered creating awareness of the importance of communication for knowledge sharing in better performance, and thus increasing collegiality among the Institute's members.

In this regard, I conducted a focus group activity that helped examine the awareness of the tutors regarding the role of communication and dimensions of organisational climate. The activity showed that tutors had little in-depth understanding and practical knowledge of communication within the work context. However, they gained in-depth insights through negotiations and discussions in the focus group and thus developed an awareness of the importance of communication in working practice.

Communication and facilitation play also an important role in online learning and teaching process (Meyer, 2002). For deep level learning and student interaction in an online context, the consideration of innovative pedagogical practices is crucial (Gilbert, 2001; Tynjala and Hakkinen, 2005).

In this respect, creating a powerful learning and communication environment in online education through collaborative knowledge building, interactive learning and the facilitation of the tutors became significant dialogues in my research context.

Online education is an approach to learning and teaching that utilizes new technology to communicate and collaborate in the construction of knowledge. The process of online communication needs to help learners actively construct knowledge in small

groups through the facilitation of the tutors (Jonassen *et al.*, 1995; Piezon and Donaldson, 2005). Leading and facilitating groups to socially construct knowledge through communicating and collaborating with others is thus a critical success factor in developing a quality online pedagogy (Meyer, 2002). This requires the development of an effective online pedagogy, particularly with regard to the roles of tutors in online socialisation and learning process (Bürger *et al.*, 2003; Fung, 2004).

Many studies highlight the importance of tutors in creating active and collaborative learning environments to help students construct knowledge (Coppola *et al.*, 2002; Salmon, 2002; Easton, 2003; Maor, 2003; Lim and Cheah, 2003; Sims, 2003; Pan and Sullivan, 2005). Meanwhile, Salmon (2002) has described the roles of online tutors in terms of their technical skills, their online communication and moderation skills, their content expertise, confidence and motivation to teach online. These skills are essential to facilitate communication in enhancing construction of knowledge for students.

Salmon (2002) further proposes a five stage model in online pedagogy incorporating access and motivation, online socialisation, information exchange, knowledge construction, development in order to create active and productive learning and a productive teaching environment. This model provided the rationale for my research project.

Berge (1999), Maor (2003), Bryun (2004) provided an additional theoretical framework to my research by putting the emphasis on online communication, tutoring and social presence through the definition of the role of the tutors in a simple metaphor of four hats representing the pedagogical, social, managerial and technical roles of the practitioner.

In my research project, in-depth interviews were conducted with the tutors in order to explore the awareness of the tutors of online pedagogy and their roles. The interviews

showed that tutors had little preliminary knowledge and insufficient experience of online pedagogy and roles. Training on online pedagogy and the practice of these roles helped tutors to internalize their roles and pedagogy. After the training, the action process provided the opportunity to transfer knowledge from training to practice.

The self-reports of the students and tutors showed that the tutors gained insights into online pedagogy, and put into practice their managerial, technical, pedagogical and social roles. In addition, they promoted online socialisation and facilitated student work in ways which resulted in both satisfaction and better learning. Significantly, the tutors demonstrated the practice and efficacy of Salmon's five stage model with regard to developing practice in online pedagogy.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

Regarding the participatory action research process, my research project resulted in successful change and development in online pedagogy. At the end of the project, different tutors from different departments and backgrounds gained pedagogical knowledge through reflection about online education, and had an enhanced awareness of the roles of online tutors.

In addition, collaboration and negotiation amongst online tutors helped develop collegiality and critical friendship for organizational knowledge and development. In a broader sense, the research project was relevant throughout to the quality mission of EMU regarding the development of Distance Education Institute practices as recommended by the EUA.

In summary, my research project revealed the following conclusions:

- Communication in the Institute: Tutors gained in-depth insights into the importance of communication and knowledge sharing. This helped establish a collegial approach to their work. In addition, tutors intensively interpreted the

dimensions of organisational climate throughout the research process. This contributed an increase in their professional learning on constructive communication and knowledge sharing for organisational change and development.

- The roles of tutors: Tutors internalized and practiced their managerial, pedagogical, social and technical roles in the online learning and teaching process. They learned how to teach online courses and deepened their understanding of online pedagogy.
- Online socialisation: Tutors acted to promote online socialisation for students through group work and reflective activities to reduce social barriers in constructing knowledge.
- Facilitation: Tutors developed as facilitators, which promoted active participation in the courses and resulted in knowledge construction and student satisfaction.

Participatory action research was the basis through which I and the tutors worked together to promote better working practice. In this action learning process, my project incorporated critical activities to help achieve success in teaching online courses and internalizing online pedagogy.

In relation to the conclusions of my research project and insights from the participatory action, some analytical generalizations can be listed as following:

- Participatory action research contributes change and development in working practice regarding the roles of tutors in facilitating communication and actively participating in the construction of knowledge. At the same time, it promotes collegiality between participants, which contributes to professional development.

- Online education practices are an innovation strategy in higher education institutions that promote quality improvements.
- Communication has a great role to play in developing organisational climate.
- Online pedagogy is the critical success factor for online education to attain quality outcomes.
- Tutors need to attend regular trainings, seminars and conferences on online pedagogy to extend their knowledge and experiences.
- Tutors need to pay attention to social barriers, which may create challenges in constructing knowledge.
- The four hats metaphor successfully captures the pedagogical, managerial, social and technical roles that need to co-exist in harmony if students are to be helped to construct knowledge in online courses.
- In the online learning and teaching process, access and motivation, online socialization, information exchange, knowledge construction, development are the essential steps.
- In the online learning and teaching process, students need to be encouraged to participate by tutors acting as facilitators.
- Tutors need to develop learning communities and encourage group discussions for constructing knowledge and for online socialisation.
- In facilitation, tutors need to have appropriate questioning, listening and feedback skills, the ability to provide direction and support to learners, the ability to manage online discussion, the ability to build online teams, a capacity for relationship building and the ability to motivate students.
- Preparing learning support agreements with students contributes to building trust between tutor and the students.

- Asking the learning community about their expectations increases the quality of the online course.
- The development of thinking skills of students through discussions, negotiations and group work is relevant for assessment in online courses.

#### **6.4 Major Implications**

My research aimed to investigate communication practices and the roles of online tutors in facilitating communication to construct knowledge within the online teaching and learning process. This required emphasising change oriented actions through participatory action research for better working practice. As online pedagogy is one of the critical factors behind quality improvements, my research aimed to address the skill deficit of tutors in facilitating communication and active participation and to construct knowledge through practical and collaborative work.

The learning cycle in the participatory action research process was rewarding and successful for all concerned. My project also opened an academic debate on implementing practical work through participatory action research for the improvement of online pedagogy and practice, and identified a model of practice that could be shared with other higher education institutions. The implications for practice are as follows:

- My project proposes that participatory action research is a significant process for change and development for better working practice.
- The process helps participants gain in-depth insights into pedagogical and organizational developments within online education for quality.
- The process raises awareness of the dimensions of organizational climate.
- It provides in-depth insights into online pedagogy.

- It extends knowledge and experience of how to teach online courses through enhancing awareness of roles and online socialization.
- It leads to the development of professional learning and experience.

### **6.5 Recommendations**

My research project provided insights into online pedagogy within my working practice. In this respect, I helped create an organisational climate based on communication practices, extending knowledge and improved practice of online tutors regarding their roles on how to teach online courses. Although my research project revealed significant contributions to my working practice, there are issues that need to be investigated in detail in further studies.

In this respect, social barriers and online socialisation within working practice and online courses could be investigated in detail in order to clarify the impact of social presence and barriers within online learning and teaching process.

Action research was employed in my project with change and innovation implemented for better working practice. Comparative case studies could be implemented in further research to compare different institutes regarding the roles of tutors.

The project involved a qualitative enquiry. In relation to research design, a mixed approach could be used to compensate for the disadvantages of qualitative and quantitative research design in terms of the validity and reliability of the research.

In this chapter, I have conducted a general evaluation of my project, drawn conclusions, discussed implications, and made recommendations. The following chapter is a critical reflection on the research process and gives details about the contributions of my project to professional knowledge.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **CRITICAL REFLECTION ON RESEARCH PROCESS**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a critical reflection on my project and its contributions to my professional knowledge. It provides reflections on challenges, managing changes, and managing the roles of being a worker researcher in the research process.

#### **7.2 Reflections on Work Based Research Project: Impact on Professional**

##### **Knowledge**

My project was focused on communication practices and the roles of tutors and aimed to support the continuous improvement of the Distance Education Institute at EMU based on EUA norms. My project aimed to impact upon the professional development of online tutors in their roles within the online learning and teaching process by stressing the significance of communication.

My project resulted in a handbook on how to teach online course for the Higher Education Council in Turkey, Higher Education Council in North Cyprus and EMU. It was also put in the public domain through the Management Centre in Nicosia, and distributed to the press, professionals, academics and other stakeholders. Further to this, my project was disseminated via presented papers in international conferences, having a published paper in TOJET (Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology) and a paper submitted to EJER (Eurasian Journal of Educational Research).

Furthermore, official letters from the School of Tourism and Management and the Distance Education Institute underlined how my work based project was significant for institutional development. The project provided varied opportunities to be a researcher



in different projects. It also contributed to my professional knowledge and that of the online tutors.

Having completed the project, it is essential to look back and review the actions that were employed and discuss the impact of my project on professional knowledge and the insights and knowledge gained by the participants.

### **7.3 Reflections on the Nature of Work Based Research Project**

My teaching and research experiences started when I was a research assistant in the Department of Educational Sciences. As I am now a senior instructor and researcher in both the Faculty of Education and Distance Education Institute at EMU, I have gained a depth of knowledge and understanding by continuing my education and experiences. After I successfully completed a broad-based Masters degree, covering education, technology and communication in line with distance education practice, this project provided a chance for me to specialize in a particular area. In this respect, these experiences provided me with insights into my own learning management by developing and broadening my understanding in terms of both the theoretical and practical knowledge of distance education practice.

Being a senior instructor and a researcher provided me with many opportunities for learning, and my academic background and position gave me great enthusiasm to conduct the research project. On the other hand, my enthusiasm was tempered by the situation of the country which is biased against new ways of learning and has a centralized based education system. This restricts open minded people from conducting innovative practices. Although there are restrictions in conducting research in this small country, the EUA report about EMU practice became a milestone for me as a researcher worker and the basis for my research project. As I was becoming aware of the need to consider the roles of tutors in creating an environment of active, the EUA

report emphasized the importance of conducting wide ranging research and giving importance to distance education practices. Therefore, I applied for a research project that was funded by Ministry of Education in order to support the Distance Education Institute's as a worker researcher. This contributed to developing my management skills and ability to allocate resources.

EMU set its vision and mission for continuous quality improvement according to the report of the EUA. In this respect, the issue of online education gained importance as a way of supporting continuous quality improvement in the university and in the Distance Education Institute. Conducting research became important for university policy and work based learning and projects provided an opportunity to pursue this policy.

In line with this rationale, the Distance Education Institute at EMU provided access to conduct research for change and development of the institute based on EUA norms. Therefore, my project aimed to support an action plan for the Distance Education Institute in EMU regarding online education practice and focusing on the role of tutors in facilitating communication in constructing knowledge and developing professional and organizational knowledge.

The intense need for the implementation of an action plan for the development of Distance Education Institute, and the focus of my project validated my practical work and the work I was conducting in the Doctorate in Professional Studies Programme.

In these respects, my project accomplished the following objectives:

- ✓ To develop awareness of the relevance of communication and organizational climate in the Distance Education Institute and online learning and teaching in order to focus on social interaction

- ✓ To provide training on the roles of tutors and create awareness of their roles in the online learning and teaching process
- ✓ To enhance the online socialization of students by overcoming social barriers
- ✓ To create an organizational culture in the Distance Education Institute by focusing on communication practices between tutors and among students.

In my project, inductive reasoning was used to focus on the experiences of online tutors, and the meanings of the actions that they constructed through social interactions. Therefore, a qualitative research design suited my research and the online tutors played a great role in my project with their efforts, reflections and perceptions regarding the research.

The action research approach adopted facilitated my practical work with the online tutors and provided them with insights on how to teach their courses, considering their roles in the Distance Education Institute. Choosing the research approach was a challenging process for me, particularly in terms of interpreting the essences of action research for implementation.

On the other hand, I felt excited and motivated by my experiences of the new approach and the ways in which it provided new ways of learning to participants. Therefore, I put a lot of effort into managing the series of actions in my research project in a planned way. My project included a series of actions, including focus groups, in-depth interviews, self-reports and training which were used as data collection techniques and actions in order to reach the research objectives.

The training and the changes that resulted during the action research were the main achievement, particularly in the enhancement of the knowledge of novice tutors about the online teaching-learning process. The action research cycle involved strategic

preplanning and careful consideration in order to prevent dilemmas in the research process.

As the online tutors were the key characters in the project, gaining access to research participants was conducted strategically so that the online tutors became voluntarily part of the project. Consent forms were prepared and signed by research participants in order to reach a common understanding of the research project and its actions.

I established self-disclosure through having good communication, ensuring punctuality, setting the right time and places for meetings and considering all details in every event.

I prepared research packages for each research participant that gave detailed information about the research project's aim, objectives, data collection techniques, training information, project report, the roles of worker researcher as insider researcher and the impact of my research project. This demonstrates how I paid attention to the research participants within the action research process. As my project was funded by the Ministry of Education, I was able to use resources in an efficient way. Expenditure included buying incentives such as a webcam, pen, headphones and folder bags for online tutors, preparing handbooks on how to teach online courses to online tutors and other higher education institutions, and organizing focus groups and training sessions. "Challenge" can be seen in every aspect of research. It is good to have challenges if these challenges can be managed by researchers for success. As a worker researcher, every challenge motivated me to produce better work. Persuading online tutors to the part of the research project was the first challenge. Explaining to them the importance of the research project convinced them to be research participants. This involved face to face meetings, giving detailed information through the research package, and establishing a reputation among colleagues as an expert in this field. Novice online

tutors were well-informed that they had the chance to gain knowledge about online pedagogy through the action learning process.

Conducting the focus group was another challenge. Getting participants to respond to questions in front of group was difficult due to cultural factors. My communication skills were very important in overcoming this cultural barrier and getting the participants to open up.

Subsequent focus group actions were easier for me, and the in-depth interviews were very fruitful as the online tutors expressed their thoughts on their changing roles and became aware of not having enough knowledge about online pedagogy. Thus, they realized how training was crucial to enhance their knowledge of their roles.

Finding the right time to meet online tutors was another challenge. My intellectual flexibility and patience however enabled me to create mutual understanding among participants. The words “Management”, “Pre-planned”, “Empathy”, “Enthusiasm”, “Efficient”, “Critical Reflection”, “Negotiation”, “Mutuality” became keys to my success. The project management required high responsibility, intellectual flexibility and networking skills. These key skills enabled me to make positive contributions to the outcome of the research project.

#### **7.4 The Whole Picture: Professional Knowledge**

My project was incorporated within my educational background and experiences to date. I had the enthusiasm and ambition to conduct practical work in the field of online education in order to increase my experiences in project management. I also was of the firm belief that a Doctorate in Professional Studies represented an opportunity for me to enhance my professionalism in online education. Through my work based learning and project, my role as worker researcher and senior instructor at the university empowered and enriched me, providing different engagements and experiences. The

project reinforced my strong belief in the lifelong learning process and my enthusiasm for new ways of learning. As stated, I also experienced how to be a worker researcher within the action research process and supported practice in my own working context by providing professional and organizational knowledge to the Distance Education Institute.

To this end, the following outcomes were achieved within the research process through collaborative work by the researcher, research participants, supervisor and consultants.

- Communication in the Institute: Tutors gained in-depth insights into the importance of communication and knowledge sharing. This promoted collegial activities. In addition, tutors intensively interpreted the dimensions of the organizational climate in the research process and thus increased their professional learning on constructive communication and knowledge sharing for organizational change and development.
- The roles of tutor: Tutors internalized and practiced their managerial, pedagogical, social and technical roles in the online learning and teaching process. They learned how to teach online courses and deepened their understanding of online pedagogy.
- Online socialization: Tutors acted to promote online socialization for students through group work and reflective activities to decrease social barriers in constructing knowledge.
- Facilitation: Tutors assumed the role of facilitator to promote active participation in the course, which resulted in the construction of knowledge and the satisfaction of students.

The following Table X summarizes the incorporation of my project objectives and the evidence of achievement within my project. The table gives details of events within the

research process and shows how my objectives were achieved and how the project was disseminated.

**Table X. Research Objectives and Achievement**

Objectives	Achievement
1. To develop awareness of the relevance of communication, organizational climate in Distance Education Institute and online learning and teaching in order to focus on social interaction	Achieved: Research package that included detailed information about research process, importance of communication and dimensions of organizational climate; focus group event provided awareness on the relevance of communication, organizational climate in Distance Education Institute. Further to this, in-depth interview, meetings with online tutors, theoretical framework of the research project and the training enhanced awareness of online learning and teaching in order to focus on social interaction
2. To provide trainings on the roles of tutors and create awareness about their roles in the online learning and teaching process	Achieved: Training to online tutors, giving research package about research process and theoretical framework of the project, handbook on how to teach online course to online tutors, presenting papers at international conference, publishing paper in TOJET, presenting project to the public (professionals, other stakeholders) created awareness of tutors' roles in online learning

	and teaching process. At the same time, the academic agenda was informed by these events.
3. To enhance online socialization of students by overcoming social barriers	Achieved: Training to online tutors, giving web cam and headphones to online tutors for stressing importance of online communication and socialization, handbook on how to teach online course to tutors about theoretical framework of the project, self reports of online students, training to online students about online learning.
4. To create an organizational culture in the Distance Education Institute by focusing on communication practices between tutors and among students.	Achieved: Distance Education Institute and online tutors gained the sense of organizational culture through action learning within the action research process. Communication practices between tutors and among students were enhanced through the focus group, in-depth interview, training, self reports. Further to this, the process of evaluating the sustainability of the project and the feedback process showed how the Distance Education Institute and tutors internalized the importance of communication. Presenting the project to the public (professionals, other stakeholders),



	giving the handbook on how to teach online course to the Higher Education Councils in both Turkey and North Cyprus, giving certificates to online tutors from the Distance Education Institute, having official letters from the School of Tourism, and Hospitality Management for opening a new master degree programme and courses all showed the contributions of the project.
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In this participatory action research, I as researcher and the tutors worked together to promote better working practice through critical activities that provided the evidence that the research had been successful.

The handbook on how to teach online course for online tutors and other higher education institutions, the certificates given to online tutors for their participation in this project by Director of Distance Education Institute, the receipt of official letters from the Distance Education Institute certifying the impact of my project, the presentation of the the outcomes of my research to stakeholders and public audiences, the official letter from the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management for the opening of the new master degree programme and courses all stressed the significant achievements of my work project.

These achievements were confirmed through a consultancy for a new university about online education systems, presentations to the public and at international conferences and the publication of a research papers in an SSCI journal. These activities have led to further engagement with professionals in the field of online education, including

becoming a member of ACCE Spaces of Interaction, and starting on new research projects as a responsible researcher in strategic planning and management.

The whole picture was developed from the enthusiasm, ambition and efforts that I internalized as part of the DProf programme and which made practical work an intrinsic part of my professional knowledge.

Although I have many roles in my life, as a mother, researcher and teacher, I managed these roles via a multidimensional perspective. I believe that “Human group life is (multi) perspectival, is reflective and negotiable”. Being multi-perspectival, reflective and negotiable were key to my role as a worker researcher contributing to the policy development of the Distance Education Institute through my work based project.

Through this research project, I realized that I had the potential to make a valuable contribution to the field of online education and to the practice of the Distance Education Institute at EMU. I believe that this research process enhanced my work based learning process, and my critical reflection and learning management skills. It has enabled me to upgrade my knowledge in both the research and subject field and enhance and enrich my personal and professional development.

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## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

#### Participant Information Sheet

**Research Project Title:** “Action plan on communication practices: Roles of tutors at EMU Distance Education Institute to overcome social barriers in constructing knowledge”

#### Introduction:

The purpose of this research project is to analyze the Distance Education Institute by employing the framework of communication flow in order to investigate roles of tutors to facilitate communication in constructing knowledge at Eastern Mediterranean University in an online context. Therefore, it aims to create an action plan for the development of Distance Education Institute based on European University Association Standards by focusing on the roles of tutors in facilitating communication.

#### Information about Participants’ Involvement in the Research

Participants in accepting the invitation to take part in the research will be involved the process of conducting training, in-depth interview, focus groups and self reports with their permission as data collection methods. Analysis of interviews and training reports, self-reports based on criteria regarding a literature review. Also, keeping a research diary and reflection provides gaining greater insights on research process as an insider researcher. Gathered data will be treated strictly confidential.

#### Benefits

The research grants an insight into the roles of tutors to facilitate communication in constructing knowledge of students within online context by analyzing features of communication practice in organization. It may help them to be aware of the changing roles in teaching practice and changing communication skills within online context for the student satisfaction. It provides the Distance Education Institute an action plan to increase its reputation within the quality improvement process.

#### Risks

No risks to participants are anticipated. As mentioned above, all steps of collecting data will be taken to guarantee confidentiality and privacy. Participants may voluntarily withdraw from the study if they choose to do so.

#### Confidentiality

Data gathered in the research study will be kept confidential. All the data will be stored in my residence. No participant shall be mentioned by name in any written or oral presentation of the findings. Pseudonyms will be used. If there is information that participant prefer to keep in confidence or information that might jeopardize confidentiality, that information will be deleted from the data analysis.

#### Contact Information

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Fahriye Altinay at 0533 8641101 or [fahriye.altinay@emu.edu.tr](mailto:fahriye.altinay@emu.edu.tr).

### **Participant Consent Form**

**Research Project Title:** “Action plan on communication practices: Roles of tutors at EMU Distance Education Institute to overcome social barriers in constructing knowledge”

**Researcher’s Name:** Fahriye Altinay

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part in research.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that data will be stored at the researcher’s residence
- I understand that I may contact the researcher if I require further information about the research, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

**Signed** .....(Research Participant)

**Print name** ..... **Date** .....

## APPENDIX B

### FOCUS GROUP THEMES AND QUESTIONS

**Focus:** Providing Awareness about the Role of Communication

Dimensions of Organisational Climate:

Author	Climate dimensions	Type of relationship
Ekvall <i>et al.</i> (1983)	Independence of action and behavior of organization's members Commitment of organization's members with organizational goals Confidence, dynamism, spontaneity in work relations Reduced presence of personal and emotional tensions in organization Support and stimulus to develop new ideas and respond rapidly to new opportunities	Positive relationship
Abbey and Dickson (1983)	Intrinsic and extrinsic recognition Predisposition to risk and to experimenting with innovative proposals and ideas	Positive relationship
Van Gundy (1985)	Autonomy Rewards linked to personal performance Organization's propensity to risk Support for creativity Tolerance of individual differences Personal commitment of organization's members Top management's support and involvement Responsibility to initiate new ideas Job security Moderate level of job ambiguity	Positive relationship Technological innovation
Nystrom (1990)	Support for new ideas Encourage freedom, challenge, risk assumption and debate Conflict Low confidence	Positive relationship
Ekvall (1991)	Support for new ideas Encourage freedom, challenge, risk assumption and debate	Positive relationship
Saleh and Wang (1993)	Organizational climate is not an important factor in encouraging or restricting innovation	
Woodman <i>et al.</i> (1993)	Reward systems	Positive relationship with organization's creative behavior
Amabile <i>et al.</i> (1996)	Encourage creativity Autonomy Sufficient resources Little pressure	Positive relationship with creative behavior and innovation
Szymanski and Varadarajan (2001)	Open communication Support for search for new ways of carrying out tasks	Organizational climate moderates relationship between market information and generation of new product ideas

Focus Group Questions:

1. What do you think about innovation practices in the Distance Education Institute?
2. How could you define communication?
3. How could you define organizational communication within the Institute?
4. Could you tell me about the commitment of institute members to the institutional goals?
5. Are new ideas supported in the institute? How?
6. How do you define confidence, dynamism, and spontaneity in your work relations within the institute?
7. Do Distance Education Institute members open to search and share for new ways of carrying out tasks? How?
8. Could you explain your communication flow with members of Distance Education Institute?
9. What do you think about the role of communication in having organizational climate at the institute?

## APPENDIX C

### FEEDBACK FORM ABOUT FOCUS GROUP

The form aims to get your evaluation and reflection on the event of focus group within action research process.

**Focus Group:** Providing awareness about the role of communication

1. Could you provide your reflection and evaluation about the contributions of focus group to you that aim to provide awareness about the role of communication?
2. What have learnt specifically from the focus group event?

## **APPENDIX D**

### **IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**Focus:** Providing Awareness of Changing Roles of Tutors

1. How long have you been a tutor in the Distance Education Institute?
2. Which online course are you teaching?
3. Could you tell me about your experiences within teaching process?
4. Do you believe that online pedagogy is different from traditional pedagogy? How?
5. How could you differentiate online teaching and traditional teaching?
6. What are the roles of tutors in online learning and teaching process?
7. While teaching your online course, what roles do you think you are performing?
8. Are you and your students experiencing social barriers in online teaching- learning process? How?
9. How do online students construct their knowledge in online context?
10. What roles are you pursuing to provide students constructing knowledge in online context?



## APPENDIX E

### TRAINING

#### A. What is Online Pedagogy?

The term “[pedagogy](#)” encompasses the approach, the methods and strategies, and the underlying epistemology of an approach to teaching. The skills, training, and commitment of the instructor are critical to the implementation of an effective online pedagogy. Online courses require different strategies to present content, interact with students, and assess course outcomes. Ultimately, the approach that will be used by an instructor depends on his or her personal philosophical beliefs about teaching and learning.

Online teaching is moving from an emphasis on web content to a more interactive structure that recognises the social and interactive elements of knowledge construction, and to pedagogical approaches that enable student-centred (e.g. problem-based, inquiry-based, discovery, and authentic learning) which are found to be extremely effective for online learning (Jasinski 2001; Ambrose 2001; Salmon 2000b). Teachers need to have much more than just technical competence if they are to be successful online. They need an understanding of the dynamics of online communication and interactions and need to learn effective ways of facilitating and teaching online.

It should not be assumed that teachers (or students for that matter) automatically know how to communicate or behave online (Coghlan 2001).

### B. Online Teaching Process and Online Socialization

STAGE	STUDENT ACTIVITIES	TUTOR ACTIVITIES
Stage 1 Access and motivation	Setting up system and accessing	Welcome and encouragement Guidance on where to find technical support
Stage 2 On-line socialization	Sending and receiving messages	Introductions Ice-breakers Ground rules Netiquette
Stage 3 Information exchange	Carrying out activities Reporting and discussing findings	Facilitate structured activities Assign roles and responsibilities Support use of learning materials Encourage discussions Summarize findings and/or outcomes
Stage 4 Knowledge construction	Conferencing Course-related discussions Critical thinking applied to subject material Making connections between models and work-based learning experiences	Facilitate open activities Facilitate the process Asking questions Encourage reflection. Tutor is very active at this stage.
Stage 5 Development.	Use of conferencing in a strategic way Integration of CMC into other forms of learning Reflection on learning processes Students become critical of the medium	Support Respond only when required Encourage reflection Tutor is less active and hands over to the students

Salmon (2002)

### C. Roles of Tutors in Constructing Knowledge

1. There are four hat metaphors on the role of tutors (Berge, 1995; Maor, 2003) which are pedagogical, social, managerial and technical. These roles are explained in follow:

- **Pedagogical Role:** this includes designing and delivering an appropriate educational experience, encouraging participation and fostering deep learning and reflection
- **Social Role:** this involves creating a learning community that supports and encourages students, monitoring progress and participation.
- **Managerial Role:** this includes setting the agenda, objectives, procedures and rules of the educational activities.
- **Technical Role:** this involves making participants comfortable with the technology and ultimately to make the technology transparent.

2. Salmon (2002) proposes roles of tutors regarding to five stage framework as a model of teaching and learning online.

#### **Stage 1                      Access and motivation**

- Ensure that the on-line group is set up with a welcome message
- Ensure students know how to access the on-line group

#### **Stage 2                      On-line socialization**

- Lead a round of introductions with, perhaps, an on-line ice-breaker
- Welcome new team members or late arrivals
- Provide a structure for getting started e.g. agreement of group rules, Netiquette
- If individuals break the agreed group netiquette then tackle them (either privately or through the discussion group)
- Wherever possible avoid playing 'ping pong' with individual group members and ask other people for their opinions and ideas
- Encourage quieter members and browsers (sometimes called 'lurkers' or 'browsers') to join in
- Provide summaries of on-line discussions. This is called weaving and involves summarizing and synthesising the content of multiple responses in a virtual group.

#### **Stage 3                      Information exchange**

- Provide highly structured activities at the start of the group life
- Encourage participation
- Ask questions
- Encourage team members to post short messages
- Allocate on-line roles to individual members e.g. to provide a summary of a particular thread of discussion
- Close of threads as and when appropriate
- Encourage the on-line group to develop its own life and history. Welcome shared language, metaphors, rituals and jokes.

#### Stage 4 Knowledge construction

- Provide more open activities
- Facilitate the learning process
- Pose questions for the group to consider
- Encourage group members to question theory and practice e.g. links (or lack of connection) between theory and work-based practice
- Encourage the group to develop its own life and history. Welcome shared language, metaphors, rituals and jokes.

#### Stage 5 Development

- Encourage group members to lead discussions
- Encourage group members to transfer their skills to other areas of their work
- Support individual 'risk'
- Encourage reflection on different learning processes (individual and group)

3. Salmon (2002) provides a schema on the competencies of online tutors.

	RECRUIT		TRAIN		DEVELOP	
Quality/ characteristic	1. CONFIDENT	2. CONSTRUCTIVE	3. DEVELOPMENTAL	4. FACILITATING	5. KNOWLEDGE SHARING	6. CREATIVE SHARING
Understanding of online process A	Personal experience as an online learner, flexibility in approaches to teaching and learning. Empathy with the challenges of becoming an online learner	Able to build online trust and purpose for others. Understand the potential of online learning and groups	Ability to develop and enable others, act as catalyst, foster discussion, summarize, restate, challenge, monitor understanding and misunderstanding, take feedback	Know when to control groups, when to let go, how to bring in non- participants, know how to pace discussion and use time online, understand the five- stage scaffolding process and how to use it	Able to explore ideas, develop arguments, promote valuable threads, close off unproductive threads, choose when to archive	Able to use a range of approaches from structured activities (e-tivities) to freewheeling discussions, and to evaluate and judge success of these
Technical skills B	Operational understanding of software in use, reasonable keyboard skills, able to read fairly comfortably on screen, good, regular, mobile access to the Internet	Able to appreciate the basic structures of online conferencing, and the Web and Internet's potential for learning	Know how to use special features of software for e-moderators, eg controlling, weaving, archiving. Know how to 'scale up' without consuming inordinate amounts of personal time, by using the software productively	Able to use special features of software to explore learner's use, eg message history, summarizing, archiving	Able to create links between other features of learning programmes, introduce online resources without diverting participants from interaction	Able to use software facilities to create and manipulate conferences and e-tivities and to generate an online learning environment, able to use alternative software and platforms
Online communication skills C	Courteous and respectful in online (written) communication, able to pace and use time appropriately	Able to write concise, energizing, personable online messages	Able to engage with people online (not the machine or the software), respond to messages appropriately, be appropriately 'visible' online, elicit and manage students' expectations	Able to interact through e-mail and conferencing, and achieve interaction between others, be a role model. Able to gradually increase the number of participants dealt with successfully	Able to value diversity with cultural sensitivity; explore differences and meanings	Able to communicate comfortably without visual cues, able to diagnose and solve problems and opportunities online, use humour online, use and work with
Content expertise D	Knowledge and experience to share, willingness to add own contributions	Able to encourage sound contributions from others, know of useful online resources for their topic	Able to trigger debates by posing intriguing questions. Know when to intervene, when to hold back	Carry authority by awarding marks fairly to students for their participation, contributions and learning outcomes	Know about valuable resources (eg on the Web) and use them as sparks in e-tivities	Able to enliven conferences through use of multi-media and electronic resources, able to give creative feedback and build on participants' ideas
Personal characteristics E	Determination and motivation to become an e-moderator	Able to establish an online identity as e-moderator	Able to adapt to new teaching contexts, methods, audiences and roles	Show sensitivity to online relationships and communication	Show a positive attitude, commitment and enthusiasm for online learning	Know how to create and sustain a useful, relevant online learning community

#### **4. How to be a facilitator?**

Online facilitation, in broad terms can be described as the act of managing the learners and the learning through an online medium.

Facilitation can also refer to managing 'the communication of others online' (Coghlan, 2001). In online learning this managing is usually done by a teacher or tutor. It is frequently referred to in the literature as 'online moderation', though moderating can also be a student task in some circumstances.

Facilitation is also a pedagogical term that applies to student-centred approaches to teaching as opposed to teacher-driven - the teacher's role moving from expert to one of facilitation - "sage on the stage" to "guide on the side" (Kempe, 2001).

A facilitator is an individual whose job is to help to manage a process of information exchange. The facilitator's role is to help with HOW the discussion is proceeding. Online facilitators take on many important roles and, thus, wear different managerial, technical, social, and pedagogical hats. Effective facilitators must know how to provide formative feedback, offer technical guidance, foster community, and communicate 'from the side' in a way that encourages learners to construct knowledge together.

#### **The role of facilitator**

There is reasonable consensus within the literature about the changing and challenging role of the teacher in online learning. Kemshah-Bell (2001) gives good coverage on the collective views, categorising skills and attributes into three main areas - technical skills, facilitation skills, and managerial skills.

Facilitation skills include:

- engaging the learner in the learning process, particularly at the beginning
- appropriate questioning, listening and feedback skills
- the ability to provide direction and support to learners
- skills in managing online discussion
- ability to build online teams
- a capacity for relationship building
- motivational skills

## **APPENDIX F**

### **FEEDBACK FORM ABOUT TRAINING**

The form aims to get your evaluation and reflection on the event of training within action research process.

**Focus Group II (Training):** Providing awareness about the roles of online tutors

1. Could you provide your reflection and evaluation about the contributions of training to you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What do you think about the aim of the training?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Do you gain new knowledge from the training? How?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. How training support your online teaching?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. How training provided insight to your professional development?

## APPENDIX G

### SELF REPORTS OF ONLINE TUTORS AND STUDENTS

**Focus:** Investigating Changing Roles and New Pedagogy of Tutors

**Self-Report Questions to Online Tutors:**

A. Please explain with concrete examples about “four hats” metaphors of pedagogical, social managerial and technical roles to examine the extent to which you were able to pursue during your online teaching process.



**PEDAGOGICAL ROLE:** designing and delivering an appropriate educational experience, encouraging participation and fostering deep learning and reflection



**SOCIAL ROLE:** creating a learning community that supports and encourages students, monitoring progress and participation.



MANAGERIAL ROLE: setting the agenda, objectives, procedures and rules of the educational activities.



TECHNICAL ROLE: making participants comfortable with the technology and ultimately to make the technology transparent.

B. Please explain the process and implementation of Five Stage Model of Salmon (2002) in your online teaching process.

C. What roles did you perform to foster online socialization of students for constructing knowledge?



D. Please identify your roles that you have performed during your online teaching process according to following schema.

	RECRUIT		TRAIN		DEVELOP	
Quality/ characteristic	1. CONFIDENT	2. CONSTRUCTIVE	3. DEVELOPMENTAL	4. FACILITATING	5. KNOWLEDGE SHARING	6. CREATIVE
Understanding of online process A	Personal experience as an online learner, flexibility in approaches to teaching and learning. Empathy with the challenges of becoming an online learner	Able to build online trust and purpose for others. Understand the potential of online learning and groups	Ability to develop and enable others, act as catalyst, foster discussion, summarize, restate, challenge, monitor understanding and misunderstanding, take feedback	Know when to control groups, when to let go, how to bring in non- participants, know how to pace discussion and use time online, understand the five- stage scaffolding process and how to use it	Able to explore ideas, develop arguments, promote valuable threads, close off unproductive threads, choose when to archive	Able to use a range of approaches from structured activities (e-tivities) to freewheeling discussions, and to evaluate and judge success of these
Technical skills B	Operational understanding of software in use, reasonable keyboard skills, able to read fairly comfortably on screen, good, regular, mobile access to the Internet	Able to appreciate the basic structures of online conferencing, and the Web and Internet's potential for learning	Know how to use special features of software for e-moderators, eg controlling, weaving, archiving. Know how to 'scale up' without consuming inordinate amounts of personal time, by using the software productively	Able to use special features of software to explore learner's use, eg message history, summarizing, archiving	Able to create links between other features of learning programmes, introduce online resources without diverting participants from interaction	Able to use software facilities to create and manipulate conferences and e-tivities and to generate an online learning environment; able to use alternative software and platforms
Online communication skills C	Courteous and respectful in online (written) communication, able to pace and use time appropriately	Able to write concise, energizing, personable online messages	Able to engage with people online (not the machine or the software), respond to messages appropriately, be appropriately 'visible' online, elicit and manage students' expectations	Able to interact through e-mail and conferencing, and achieve interaction between others, be a role model. Able to gradually increase the number of participants dealt with successfully	Able to value diversity with cultural sensitivity; explore differences and meanings	Able to communicate comfortably without visual cues, able to diagnose and solve problems and opportunities online, use humour online, use and work with
Content expertise D	Knowledge and experience to share, willingness to add own contributions	Able to encourage sound contributions from others, know of useful online resources for their topic	Able to trigger debates by posing intriguing questions. Know when to intervene, when to hold back	online, without huge amounts of extra personal time Carry authority by awarding marks fairly to students for their participation, contributions and learning outcomes	Know about valuable resources (eg on the Web) and use them as sparks in e-tivities	Able to enliven conferences through use of multi-media and electronic resources, able to give creative feedback and build on participants' ideas
Personal characteristics E	Determination and motivation to become an e-moderator	Able to establish an online identity as e-moderator	Able to adapt to new teaching contexts, methods, audiences and roles	Show sensitivity to online relationships and communication	Show a positive attitude, commitment and enthusiasm for online learning	Know how to create and sustain a useful, relevant online learning community

### Self-Report Questions to Online Students:

A. Please explain with concrete examples about “four hats” metaphors of pedagogical, social managerial and technical roles of your tutors that you have experienced in online learning process.



**PEDAGOGICAL ROLE:** designing and delivering an appropriate educational experience, encouraging participation and fostering deep learning and reflection



**SOCIAL ROLE:** creating a learning community that supports and encourages students, monitoring progress and participation.



**MANAGERIAL ROLE:** setting the agenda, objectives, procedures and rules of the educational activities.



**TECHNICAL ROLE:** making participants comfortable with the technology and ultimately to make the technology transparent.

B. What roles did your tutor perform to foster online socialization for constructing knowledge?

C. Please identify roles of your tutor that s/he has performed during your online learning process according to following schema.

	RECRUIT		TRAIN		DEVELOP	
Quality/ characteristic	1. CONFIDENT	2. CONSTRUCTIVE	3. DEVELOPMENTAL	4. FACILITATING	5. KNOWLEDGE SHARING	6. CREATIVE
Understanding of online process A	Personal experience as an online learner, flexibility in approaches to teaching and learning. Empathy with the challenges of becoming an online learner	Able to build online trust and purpose for others. Understand the potential of online learning and groups	Ability to develop and enable others, act as catalyst, foster discussion, summarize, restate, challenge, monitor understanding and misunderstanding, take feedback	Know when to control groups, when to let go, how to bring in non- participants, know how to pace discussion and use time online, understand the five- stage scaffolding process and how to use it	Able to explore ideas, develop arguments, promote valuable threads, close off unproductive threads, choose when to archive	Able to use a range of approaches from structured activities (e-tivities) to freewheeling discussions, and to evaluate and judge success of these
Technical skills B	Operational understanding of software in use, reasonable keyboard skills, able to read fairly comfortably on screen, good, regular, mobile access to the Internet	Able to appreciate the basic structures of online conferencing, and the Web and Internet's potential for learning	Know how to use special features of software for e-moderators, eg controlling, weaving, archiving. Know how to 'scale up' without consuming inordinate amounts of personal time, by using the software productively	Able to use special features of software to explore learner's use, eg message history, summarizing, archiving	Able to create links between other features of learning programmes, introduce online resources without diverting participants from interaction	Able to use software facilities to create and manipulate conferences and e-tivities and to generate an online learning environment, able to use alternative software and platforms
Online communication skills C	Courteous and respectful in online (written) communication, able to pace and use time appropriately	Able to write concise, energizing, personable online messages	Able to engage with people online (not the machine or the software), respond to messages appropriately, be appropriately 'visible' online, elicit and manage students' expectations	Able to interact through e-mail and conferencing, and achieve interaction between others, be a role model. Able to gradually increase the number of participants dealt with successfully	Able to value diversity with cultural sensitivity; explore differences and meanings	Able to communicate comfortably without visual cues, able to diagnose and solve problems and opportunities online, use humour online, use and work with
Content expertise D	Knowledge and experience to share, willingness to add own contributions	Able to encourage sound contributions from others, know of useful online resources for their topic	Able to trigger debates by posing intriguing questions. Know when to intervene, when to hold back	Carry authority by awarding marks fairly to students for their participation, contributions and learning outcomes	Know about valuable resources (eg on the Web) and use them as sparks in e-tivities	Able to enliven conferences through use of multi-media and electronic resources, able to give creative feedback and build on participants' ideas
Personal characteristics E	Determination and motivation to become an e-moderator	Able to establish an online identity as e-moderator	Able to adapt to new teaching contexts, methods, audiences and roles	Show sensitivity to online relationships and communication	Show a positive attitude, commitment and enthusiasm for online learning	Know how to create and sustain a useful, relevant online learning community

## **APPENDIX H**

### **FEEDBACK FORM ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROJECT**

#### **“Sustainability of the Work-based Research Project”**

This feedback form aims to evaluate the sustainability of the work based project which relies on providing awareness about the roles of communication.

You are kindly asked to record your reflections gained from participating in the work based research project activities and in reading the handbook.

1. Could you reflect on the outcomes of the work-based project entitled “Action Plan on Communication Practices: Roles of Tutors at EMU Distance Education Institute to Overcome Social Barriers in Constructing Knowledge”?

2. Could you provide your reflection and evaluation about the contributions of project activities on online pedagogy and your roles as an online tutor to facilitate learning of students in constructing knowledge?

3. How could you incorporate Salmon’s Five Stage Model (A model of teaching and learning online) to your online teaching process?

## **APPENDIX J**

### **ABBREVIATIONS**

EMU- Eastern Mediterranean University

EUA- European Universities Association

DProf- Doctorate of Professional Studies

## **EVIDENCES OF ACHIEVEMENT**

## **LIST OF EVIDENCES**

Handbook

Conference Participation

Published Paper

Press Releases

Official Letters

Certificate of Participants